

Body Opera: In Search of the 'Operatic' in the Performance of the Body

Daniel Somerville

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary practice-based thesis interrogates the term 'operatic' with particular reference to movement. It thereby aims to extract operatic movement from the practice of opera singers and investigate ways to transfer 'operaticness' into the bodies of non-singing performers. The research uses Butoh as a model for a non-foundational movement practice (termed herein 'Body Opera') and embodiment techniques derived from Butoh, to achieve this transfer of kinaesthetic information. The research was undertaken in part through interviews with opera singers and close observation of opera singers in rehearsal and performance. This process also included the making of sketches of singers in movement, which are included in the thesis and which are regarded as kinaesthetic responses to what was observed. Combining the sketches with embodiment techniques that unlock the movement they contain, the gap between the spectatorial position and the performance maker position is bridged and movement-based practice is created and presented as a component of the thesis, in dialogue with the written component. Furthermore, the spectatorial and researcher positionality are recognised as that of an 'opera queen' and this position participates in facilitating the transfer of operaticness from singers to non-singing performers.

Operatic movement is identified as that which occurs as a result of the physical restrictions of singing operatically and through the negotiation of those restrictions with the need to convey plot and character, giving rise to non-naturalistic or artificial way of moving. This emphasis on artificiality is theorised as an operatic sensibility akin to queerness. The thesis examines opera through the lens of postmodernism and in particular through a queer theoretical framework. The research analogously applies Butler's poststructuralist theories concerning performative gender construction to opera and in doing so suggests a reading of opera as potentially queer, gender fluid, subversive and non-normative. This position challenges notions of opera as elitist and pro-establishment.

The thesis posits that the operatic is an emergent property that occurs at the intersection of creative practices in opera and which is embodied by singers in performance. The thesis also posits that kinaesthetic empathy provides an explanation for how the operatic is communicated between singers and further suggests that the opera queen is similarly subject to a form of kinaesthetic empathy when listening to opera.

The thesis makes a contribution to knowledge through revealing ways in which spectatorial and performance maker positions may be bridged, as well as through suggesting practical ways in which non-singing performers might approach the task of moving operatically. The research therefore contributes to movement practice, but also to opera studies by interrogating the subject of opera from a kinaesthetic perspective that centralises the body and experience of singers in order to understand the art form.

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Introduction

{ *Overture* }

The research addressed in this thesis is a search for the 'operatic'. It is an attempt to understand what it means for the body to move 'operatically'. I am a movement practitioner and the term 'operatic' has been used by peers and other commentators to describe the way in which I move when performing. To fully understand what these comments meant I created a programme of research that interrogated the operatic in terms of movement. This was done in three ways: firstly through field studies observing how and why opera singers move the way they do; secondly, through delivering workshops to experiment with approaches for engendering operatic movement; and lastly, through creating movement based performances resulting from this investigation. As practice-based research my performances contributed to the programme through testing observations made during the field studies or resulting from the experiments. The practice thereby exposed further lines of enquiry and addressed particular points of theory. The programme of research aimed to identify operatic movement, describe and analyse it, and then extract it from opera and utilise it in my movement practice.

The written thesis not only outlines the research activities and outcomes but also engages with theoretical positions on opera, in particular using postmodern, queer and poststructural perspectives to redefine opera and view it unconventionally, while also highlighting correspondences in terms of theory between opera and my practice. Opera, and the operatic, are however, problematic to define. The boundaries of what

constitutes the genre of opera are contested, while attempts to define opera often lead to caveats and exceptions – revealing paradoxes and inconsistencies. Central to the discourse on opera is the intersection of two artistic practices, music and drama. Within debates on the nature of opera a binary opposition of score (the notation that engenders the music) and libretto (the text that engenders the drama) emerges as a defining feature. Peter Brook characterises the relationship, in which opera as an art form, attempts to treat drama and music as though they were one, as a conflict (1968, p. 19-20). Peter Conrad foregrounds the dramatic aspect of opera but acknowledges that the drama is “ritualized by music” (1987, p. 19), while for Joseph Kerman opera is “a type of drama whose integral existence is determined from point to point and in the whole by musical articulation” (1988, p. 10). Opera is constituted through the intersection of more than these two creative disciplines; it requires the intersection of several other creative practices including, but not limited to, scenography and stagecraft in order to be fully realised. Opera, in performance, may then become what Carlo Zuccarini describes as “an intermediate area that provides a bridge between your inner and outer worlds” (2014, p. 22) becoming meaningful beyond the immediate narrative.

The bridge that Zuccarini evokes is a salient concept that illustrates how I view opera and the operatic. The experience of opera, for me, when I am a part of the audience, does not only concern what is presented on stage, but extends into the auditorium and out of the theatre. The rituals and ceremonies surrounding opera, the people and

personalities and my associations with, and memories of, singers, music, voices, recordings, and opera legend, anecdote and lore, each participate in the experience of opera, albeit as it manifests through, and is mediated by, a particular performance.

To further set the tone for the journey into opera that this research represents, Sam Abel (1996) provides an initial impression of absurdity and paradox that I wish to relish and capture, not resolve or dismiss, for in what he highlights as an illogical art form I hypothesise potential for subversion and resistance – a playground of postmodern subjectivity, ripe with possibility.

Opera is a hotbed of paradox. It stages subtle intimacy between lovers with loud music, enormous scenery, and overwrought acting. It is theatre but not “legitimate” theatre; it is music but not “pure” music. Opera’s narratives abound in horrendous character inconsistencies, plot disjunctures, and motivational absurdities, all of which melt into insignificance in the sweep of its emotional intensity. Samuel Johnson rightly calls opera illogical and absurd, yet its greatest popularity came during the eighteenth century, the Age of Reason. Opera means elitism, the exclusive territory of the upper classes... Yet opera is, at its very core, a popular genre, its every aspect catering to “low” tastes for grand spectacle, sensual display, exciting action and passionate eroticism. (Abel: 1996, p. 11)

When encountering opera in an opera house, there are moments when I am immersed in the music, drama, sensual display and spectacle of an opera, when I have felt I have understood the art form, where it has revealed itself, answered somehow its own paradoxes. These moments are, for me, when opera is at its most operatic, when the creative disciplines and activities that make up an opera come together in a coalescence of elements that become greater than the sum of their parts.

The fusion of the constituent elements of opera – the dramatic action, the music, and the singing – that is occurring out there is somehow able to draw upon what is inside you, evoking real feelings and emotions despite the illusion that is mediating them. (Zuccarini: 2014, p. 22)

Zuccarini emphasises how the sound, more specifically the voice and its distortions, cause meaning to evaporate and emotion to surface, but for me it is the sight of the singer's body moving that becomes the focal point. The body of the singer acts as the axis of all the contributing creative processes and a point of access to the art form – all the text, music, architecture, lighting – everything is, in that moment, in the service of one aim, the operatic, which for me is a matter of a particular corporeality. In my account of opera and the operatic, if the body of the singer is moved in those moments then the operatic is embodied. This embodiment is described by Stanislavski who, in his writings on opera, advocates for the external influence of the music to guide the performer in their actions rather than an internal psychological motivation that he recommends for actors in theatre.

From the instant the music begins you are completely in its power. Your nerves, blood, heartbeat must all accord with the rhythm proposed by the music. Yet to seize this rhythm, live with it, let it permeate your whole being, is no easy matter... So listen most carefully to the music. You have to hear in it the reason for what you are doing and *how* you are doing it, so that your every imperceptibly unobtrusive movement will be in harmony with the music... It is the achieving of this particular kind of harmony, embodied in you on the stage that is the whole basic idea of opera. (Stanislavski: 1975, p.12)

In my experience of attending opera that spans three decades, these moments are not guaranteed, they will not occur in every production, but when they do occur they emerge as mesmerising, intoxicating, sensual, invigorating and somehow transformative experiences akin to spiritual or erotic ecstasy, suggesting an aesthetic experience.



Fig. 1: Daniel Somerville in *Trio xxx*. A moment where the performer and performed coexist in one body as opera character is played by an opera queen, driven by a desire to inhabit the character. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

Operatic moments are the reason I am an opera lover. Though rooted in the tangible, corporeal presence of the singer, they are, only ever, momentary, fleeting and unstable, they effervesce and evaporate, they tease, they provoke and crucially, they leave me wanting more. My research is an attempt to capture and understand the 'operaticness' of that movement.

The above account of the operatic in opera is my subjective account – that of a self professed opera queen [See Fig. 1]. The opera queen is not simply a gay man who

loves opera (though it is also that); it is a complex, adaptive identity, influenced by, among other things, socio-political factors. It is an identity that affords me certain insights, non-normative perspectives and alternative readings. It is an internalised, though constantly shifting, perspective from which I conducted the research and which informs the making of my performance practice.

The position of opera queen however, is within opera studies, one that is questioned, regarded as perhaps outdated. The opera queen is defined in terms of undisclosed sexuality hidden in the metaphorical closet inhabited by homosexuals in an age before decriminalisation of homosexuality, and opera in relation to the opera queen thereby viewed as a fetish or surrogate eroticism. Heather Hadlock presents the following challenge for queer opera studies: “[N]ow that opera has come out, what next? How shall queer theory and opera studies inform each other in an ‘out’ way? The increasing fragmentation of conceptions of identity make it harder to propose theoretical models of reading ... ‘as an opera queen’” (Hadlock: 2012, p. 264). My research began then as a search for a complex and largely undefined concept – the operatic – and was approached from a position (that of opera queen) the validity and efficacy of which was already contested. My thesis addresses Hadlock’s challenge therefore by assuming an unconventional, non-conservative approach to opera and through a re-evaluation of the identity of opera queen.

My lines of enquiry centred on firstly understanding the operaticness of opera in order to better understand what it meant for me to be operatic in my practice. In my practice, I make work that is principally movement based, but which includes scenographic elements, is concerned with the composition of the stage image and which sometimes includes the use of sung or spoken word. There are three important influences that contribute to my work: Firstly, my training in movement has included various contemporary approaches and physical theatre techniques but has been predominantly in Butoh, a movement practice that originated in Japan in the late 1950s, and which uses the embodiment of poetic images known as *Butoh-fu* as its main tool for engendering movement and notating choreography. The second influence is that of queer theory, a way of decentering heteronormative values and heterosexual privilege and for proposing new power relations based on the models offered by non-heteronormative sexualities.¹ This manifests in my practice through the use of cross-dressing and through the adoption of queer cabaret and neo-burlesque strategies such as stripping and the construction of short duration works with, nonetheless, an underlying political message or social commentary. The third influence on my practice is my love of opera and the tacit operaticness which that contributes. At the beginning of the research period (October 2011 – December 2013), it was this element that I felt I understood the least, which had been the least interrogated, and which therefore became the focus of my enquiry.

¹ See 'A Theoretical Framework for the Research' p. 25

This triangulation of influences led me, prior to the research period, to refer to my practice as 'Body Opera'. The term Body Opera, was first applied to my work in print based marketing material concerning the production *the moment I heard* (2011) and online in information on this production, which took place in January 2011. Ideas on this practice and the use of this term were therefore formulated in the latter part of 2010 following the positive reception of *THREE WORKS* (2010) in May and July 2010. A company called Opera Erratica use a similar term, formulated as "Body/Opera" to describe their technique, derived from Viewpoints, for training opera performers and for generating original work. This term was used in a Blog on their workshops, from December 2011 onwards (Young: 2011) and in an online video in September 2011 (Young: 2011). Body Opera is a style of movement generated through embodiment techniques derived from observing opera singers while Body/Opera describes a method for group devising. The former a style of movement for opera singers and a choreographic vocabulary for dancers or physical theatre performers, the latter a way of generating new material both physical and aural in order to create original operas as well as inform the performance of opera singers in opera. Body Opera was formulated to outline a relationship between Butoh and interdisciplinary notions of European opera as *gesamtkunstwerk* demonstrated by my involvement in all aspects of the performance making. However, within this formulation I was not intentionally adopting the term 'opera' to denote a kind of movement but nonetheless, reviewers and peers giving feedback on my performances had used the term operatic to describe the movement they saw. I had a very general sense of how operaticness might manifest in terms of

being emotionally overstated – a way of performance that sustains emotional expression over extended periods of time for example, (a quality opera performance shares with Butoh) but I did not fully understand to what this observation of my movement practice as operatic referred. My enquiry therefore became concerned with identifying and describing the operatic through observing the movement of opera singers in opera and through practical experimentation aimed at understanding the operatic and the processes by which it operates. This process required me to be able to move from a spectatorial position (observing the movement) to a performer position (performing the movement). One aspect of bridging this gap was in the use of embodiment techniques derived from my training in Butoh.

Butoh

Butoh is central to my training and performance practice and is therefore a feature of the practical elements of the research. In particular, embodiment techniques derived from Butoh are used to capture observed moments of operaticness in *Butoh-fu*-like images which are later, in studio, used to regenerate the movement and further explore, through the body, what is encountered. Embodiment techniques derived from Butoh play an essential part in the research by bridging the gap between the spectatorial, researcher-observer positions and the choreographer and performer positions. I therefore present below, a brief contextual outline of my training and experience and refer to key literature on Butoh.

I first began training in Butoh in 2007 when Juschka Weigel delivered a two week workshop as part of my undergraduate degree at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. In 2008 this training was refreshed in a continuous module as part of my MA at Goldsmiths, University of London under Marie-Gabrielle Rotie. In 2009 I undertook a year-long project with Dr Raphael Adjani at Goldsmiths which included Butoh and related Zen philosophical approaches to art making as core components. At this time I was also making and performing my own works based on the training I had received. My training in Butoh continued throughout the research period under the guidance of Marie-Gabrielle Rotie of Butoh UK, at weekly term time Butoh training sessions at the London Buddhist Arts Centre and also through workshops and short courses with other practitioners including Nissa Nishigawa (at the Royal College of Art) and Florencia Guerberoof (at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and Chisenhale Dance Space). My knowledge of Butoh is principally therefore experiential in nature and the understandings expressed in the thesis are tacit and were acquired as a result of the practice of Butoh.

Butoh uses image based scores known as *Butoh-fu*. These are poetic images, usually referring to nature, as one might find in haiku poetry. 'Dew drop on leaf' or 'pillar of dust' might engender certain qualities of tension, while 'ants on teeth' or 'snake climbing up spine' might inspire facial expressions or certain ways of contorting the body. These images are embodied as a means to transform the body of the dancer, and to recollect movements and thereby 'notate' choreography. This choreographic

methodology does not however dictate form; the same *Butoh-fu* may manifest differently in different bodies and so Butoh is not fixed choreographically other than in and through the use of *Butoh-fu*. It is in this regard that we may think of Butoh as a 'non-foundational' movement practice. Not because it is not possible to identify practitioners who founded the art of Butoh, but because at the foundation of the practice the shapes of the body are not dictated but suggested. The same *Butoh-fu* will inevitably manifest differently in different bodies, unlike in the notation of ballet, for example, where practitioners are measured against their ability to achieve a prescribed form or shape in the body, with only relatively minor allowable interpretive nuance.

As a means to contextualise my tacit knowledge and understanding of Butoh, I refer below to key literature through which I align Butoh to queer theory and postmodern performance practice while also indicating correspondences with the postmodern and queer aspects of opera discussed in the thesis.

In *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen and Japan* (1999) Sondra Fraleigh explores Butoh from the perspective of her encounter with it as a Westerner. Making connections between Western and Japanese culture from the outset, Fraleigh relates the emergence of Butoh as aesthetically and culturally inspired by *Ukiyo-e* woodcut prints, an art form which was also "much admired by the expressionists" (1999, p. 8) such as Ruth St. Denis, Mary Wigman and Martha Graham. Fraleigh thereby locates Butoh as "the most intercultural postmodern art we have... [it] might be viewed as part of the

restoration of the expressionist origins of modern dance in the postmodern period” (1999, p. 8). Bruce Baird refines Butoh’s relation to postmodernism:

[I]t makes little sense to speak of the postmodernism of Butoh as a whole. Its variety stretches from the minimalism of Judson Church in the 1960s (which might be termed Modernist) to the multimedia collaborations and boundary blurring of the 80s (which are closer to the postmodernism of other disciplines). The use of improvisation or minimalism in some Butoh is reminiscent of Judson Church, while the use of randomized choreography elsewhere in Butoh might be taken as a Japanese analogue of Merce Cunningham. (2011, p. 208)

Through the appropriation and use of non-Japanese music in some Butoh performances and the overlap with performance practices of the West, Butoh was however, “pulled into ... [the] ambit” of postmodernism, according to Baird (2011, p. 208). In analysing Kazuo Ohno’s work *Admiring L’Argentina* (1977) Baird offers several credentials for postmodernity: the gender fluidity expressed, the expression of this as character and as self portrait, fragmentation and quotations from, and references to, other works of performance, are prime examples.

Butoh was begun by Tatsumi Hijikata in 1959. He and Kazuo Ohno, were influenced in part by their training and exposure to German Expressionist dance and other Western forms such as ballet, jazz and flamenco. However, in *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo* (2006) Fraleigh & Nakamura explain: “Together Hijikata and Ohno would reject the ballet and modern dance and champion a new dance that rescued ‘the Japanese body’ on ethnographic grounds” (2006, p. 2). Paradoxically Butoh was influenced by Western modernist and postmodernist trends in dance and yet was a reaction against the West, a response to occupation and the threat of the Westernisation of Japan after World

War II. Equally paradoxically Hijikata rejected classical Japanese theatre (Fraleigh & Nakamura: 2006, p. 11). Butoh emerged as both a reaction against the West and yet is influenced by it, is influenced by Japanese aesthetics and philosophy and yet rejects classical Japanese culture. The ultimate paradox being that this Japanese form became globalised and ultimately non-culturally specific (Fraleigh & Nakamura: 2006, p. 4). This intercultural position is reiterated by Rotie. "Butoh is not Japanese. Although it arose in Japan its aspirations to search for what is in the body in its graspable and ungraspable dimensions transcend any cultural specific reading" (Rotie & Kozel: 1996, p. 34).

Butoh, which literally translates as "dance step", is very difficult to define in terms of its practice and technique. Fraleigh and Nakamura (2006) outline two broad developments in Butoh, each represented by the practices of Hijikata and Ohno respectively and both of which, albeit in different moments, I consider to have influenced my own aesthetics and practice when making performance. Hijikata's practice was characterised by rapidity, grotesque gestures, outward expressions of form, while Ohno can be regarded as having a slow, internalised and more lyrical approach. "As aesthetic associates, Hijikata and Ohno represent two opposites of yin/yang magnetic polarity" (Fraleigh & Nakamura: 2006, p. 24). The practice of internality, the generation of outward forms through internal visualisation of *Butoh-fu* was present in the practices of both founding artists. Baird describes Butoh as "an imagistic performance form by turns grotesque, serene, violent and achingly beautiful" (2011: p. 207).

In attempting to resolve what Butoh is, it is useful to reflect further on how it is constituted uniquely, within the individual dancer. "Dance has its roots in our flesh... deeply entwined with intuitions and free play of our emotions, transfiguring the body" (Ashikawa in Fraleigh: 1999, p. 142). Each practitioner might therefore be regarded as having their own Butoh – a concept inherent in the approach to Butoh in the research project of Adjani mentioned above. Reference to Butoh in this thesis is therefore, to a personal, non-foundational practice that uses embodiment, imagining, and internal reflection to generate work in a non-culturally specific way. In using the term non-culturally specific I am not seeking to remove or refuse Japanese origin but to acknowledge that if each practitioner has their own Butoh, the Japanese body cannot be the only body able to dance Butoh. Furthermore my attempts to use Butoh in my practice are not attempts to generate or mimic Japanese-ness (with the exception of *Butterfly Ghost* which deliberately does seek to do this for the purpose of exposing the layered problematic of the Orientalist fantasy inherent in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*) nor are they an attempt to occupy a Japanese cultural space with a new ethnicity, but rather an attempt to eradicate ethnicity as an axis of identity from our evaluation of Butoh as a practice.

Butoh is also recognised as a practice which blurs distinctions between genders, involving cross-dressing (Fraleigh: 1999, p. 95) and emphasising a queering, destabilising potential. It is a practice which nonetheless has a sense of theatricality

and spectacle (Fraleigh: 1999, p. 11). In these regards in particular, Butoh shares certain characteristics commonly found in opera which are important to my enquiry.

Locating my practice

Though Butoh forms a major part of my physical training, it is not the only influence in my practice, which may also be located in terms of other artists and practices. The term Body Opera describes a choreographic method, and in this sense it is related to Butoh and embodiment techniques derived from Butoh. The term also captures the relationship I have to other aspects of the performance making process and their outcomes – a kind of *gesamtkunstwerk* where even as I am creating movement I am also viewing the process of choreography as relating to all aspects of the performance including design and production. In combining a non-foundational movement practice and a desire to extend the creative vision beyond movement and think of choreography in a more holistic sense, of composing space, I am working within a tradition that Butoh also already inhabits. In applying queer performance strategies such as cross-dressing I remain aligned to Butoh which has a long tradition of gender play. Furthermore, the relation that Butoh has with postmodern performance practice enables me to consider my practice in terms of its relationship to contemporary performance practice and visual theatre. In line with postmodern theory and performance practice, for example, my work appropriates diverse cultural forms (Butoh, opera and cabaret) that nonetheless float free from their cultural origins. Besides arguing the non-cultural specificity of Butoh, the use of opera related theory and practice displaced from opera is also viewed

as a postmodernist strategy, similar to how cultural iconography is appropriated freely in postmodern art as exemplified by music videos from the 1980s or postmodern architecture that makes use of decoration from different eras of architecture, often without structural purpose (Adamson & Pavitt: 2011). The notion of Body Opera as a postmodern practice is reinforced by the manner in which my performances often use fragmentation and collage, and how they call upon the autobiographical; the personal, lived experience of the performer, and invite multiple subjective interpretation – all strategies from postmodern theatre practice. Furthermore there is, within my rehearsal and devising methods, an emphasis on process and collaboration familiar to non-linear theatre making. The use of cross-dressing, alongside a thematic interest in the position of the outsider, and other challenges to heteronormativity that my performances offer, demonstrate the use of queer performance strategies derived from queer theory (an academic discipline arising from poststructural and postmodern theory) in the generation of the work.

My practice is located then as a postmodern, intercultural, non-foundational autobiographical form of total theatre, with a strong visual emphasis and a tendency towards non-linear narratives and fragmentation which invite subjective readings. I have created works for theatre stages and studio spaces, as well as for galleries and nightclub settings; for audiences of hundreds and for one-to-one performance. I have positioned the works, at times as dance, and at times as live art, allowing them to exist between disciplines when possible. The work is interdisciplinary in two senses then –

that it requires, like opera, the intersection of several creative disciplines and activities in order to manifest, and, that it sits between artistic disciplines being perhaps theatre, perhaps dance, at times live art, visual art or installation.

Though I acknowledge an admiration for Robert Wilson's visual theatre and the movement work of Raimund Hoghe (for their clear, distilled aesthetics and lingering sense of malleable time) I also find inspiration in the madcap chaos and camp irony of Lindsey Kemp. Viewing my work against these examples the visual influence of Kemp would be most evident. As a practitioner influenced by dance, pop culture, drag and Japanese aesthetics, philosophy and performance practice alike, Kemp represents an artist with whom I share many influences. The Occidental body undertaking an Oriental performance practice is itself a mode of questioning and a critical discourse on culture and ethnicity implicit in Kemp's work, in particular, in *Onnagata*. This can also be found in the Butoh related work of Ernst Fischer, where I also recognise a kind of vulnerability and self-knowing, self-questioning way of being on stage. This sense of vulnerability, common to Kemp, Hoghe, Fischer and to South African performance artist Steven Cohen, is a quality that I both enjoy as audience and aim to achieve as artist, for its power to engage the audience in understanding the performance as a live event, replete with stage fright, self-doubt and possible consequences beyond any fictive narrative represented. The performer and performed exist in one body and at one moment. The act of performing is thereby exposed, which is how I would account for

the notion that my performances might be regarded simultaneously as dance/theatre and as live art.

In terms of the relation of opera to Butoh and dance, my practice is not unique. There are multiple examples of Butoh artists using music from opera in their performances and Butoh performer, Tadashi Endo has directed movement for opera productions. Similarly, in the world of dance theatre, Sasha Waltz and Pina Bausch are just two examples of practitioners who have adapted operas into movement based works. Where I consider I make a departure from the practice of combining operatic music and Butoh/movement, is that the movement I seek to execute is derived from the bodies of singers in opera and responds to the music principally through the embodiment of the music, as opposed to being derived from the embodiment of some other image or idea, which is then set to music.

Practitioner as researcher

The body in my performance practice I regard as a locus for the interdisciplinary art work in a similar way to how I have described the body of the singer in 'operatic moments' (see p. 3). My body is not only the medium, but also often the subject of my works. Though my practice is autobiographical rather than autoethnographic, through reference to lived experience, my practice shares qualities with Tessa Muncey's description of autoethnography (2010) in which she recommends presenting oneself to the reader through the creation of what she terms "snapshots", short statements that

capture moments from the researcher's life and build a foundation from which the reader may contextualise what follows. In order to contextualise some examples of my work I have included snapshots from the first half of my life:

A healthy baby boy is born at 9am on August 18th 1967, just a month after the decriminalisation of male homosexual conduct in private in the UK.

A child in his early teens fantasises about the other boys in the changing room after sports while feeling too embarrassed about his own body to get undressed.

A young teenager is immobilised by asthma, gasping for breath.

A frightened sixteen year old goes to the door of a gay nightclub called Heaven in London. He asks the drag queen at the door: "Do I need to be a member to get in", she replies, "Honey, you are a member!" and ushers him in.

An A-level student goes to the opera for the first time. He sees the Kent Opera production of Michael Tippett's *King Priam* at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury. Tippett is there and takes a bow. The experience is thrilling.

Standing in a dark antechamber of the Temple of Karnak, listening to *Aïda* on his Discman, a young man sees a soldier across a beam of light. They look at each other, it is erotic, sensual. The soldier disappears. The young man searches, but never finds him.

An emergent opera queen queues all night to get a ticket to see *Lucia di Lammermoor* at Covent Garden. He can't afford a programme and never remembers the name of the singer who sang Lucia. It could have been Joan Sutherland.

Gangsters search a house in Manchester for money stolen from a nightclub. A young man chooses to believe that his boyfriend had not stolen it. Their relationship is characterised by domestic violence.

A young man is treated for depression and anxiety.

A man in his late twenties is commuting to work on the Docklands Light Railway when he receives a telephone call telling him that the friend he had planned a baby with had suffered a miscarriage.

A man in his late twenties looks up at the Milky Way from South Africa. The evening call of the hippopotamus permeates the scene. He is in love.

Some examples of the works that existed prior to the research period act as further 'snapshots' or relate to the above events.² The performances discussed below illustrate my long-standing interest in exploring my life experience as a subject matter and this has drawn both the personal and political, in particular in relation to sexual orientation, into the frame.

The moment I heard (2011) dissected the moment I heard of the miscarriage, for example, and *2nd Piano Concerto (dub step)* (2011) explored the theme of domestic violence. *I'm Leaving You* (2010) was the moment I was left alone in South Africa because my then partner, diagnosed with HIV, emigrated to the USA in order to access life saving medication, at that time not available in South Africa. *First Piano Concerto* (2009) was an exploration of loneliness and correspondingly I undertook all aspects of the production (design, sound composition, choreography, performance, production and promotion) alone, in order to be true to that exploration. *Oh! England* (2008)³ was a critique of English nationalism played out through a performance in which I was dressed as Queen Elizabeth I and then stripped to reveal an England football hooligan. The work explored the culturally reductive threat of nationalism and its intersection with the eroticism of the masculinist heterosexual iconography of Englishness and sport. *My Egypt Stories* (2008) expanded the moment of eroticism in the Temple of Karnak and overlaid it with reports of a homophobic clampdown by Egyptian authorities that

² See accompanying DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Former Practice and Research Workshops and Projects' for a short video showing excerpts of practice undertaken prior to the research period, including those discussed in this introduction.

³ *Oh! England* was revived during the research period for presentation at Trans.form@work Symposium, University of Surrey, 25th May 2012, a symposium which aimed to explore and enrich the interplay between body, culture and images, asking the question: could dance operate as a critical discourse?

I had investigated while working as a journalist in Africa in 2001. These works also illustrate my interest in taking fleeting moments and expanding them, manipulating time in performance in a way reminiscent of what happens in Butoh and in opera, such as when characters deliver arias over several minutes that describe and explore an emotion that would, in life, be fleeting and ephemeral.

One work, *Mad Scene* (2011) [See Fig. 2], which reflected on my experience of mental illness, was being completed as I began this research. It was part of a triptych of works, including *The moment I heard* and *2nd Piano Concerto (dub step)* brought together under the title 'Episodes'. These works were the first in which I had worked with other performers and *Mad Scene* was the first performance I had created in which I did not appear (apart from a brief cameo 'prologue' for the performance at The Place). For these reasons it marks a departure in my practice which coincided with the beginning of my research and makes for useful diagnostic reflection.⁴

I worked with dancer Julia Fitzpatrick, who trained in ballet and who, at the time, had recently begun to work in burlesque. I also worked with Andrea Walker, a commercial street dancer, and Madaleine Trigg,⁵ a physical theatre practitioner and conceptual artist. Both the dance artists (Julia and Andrea) were used to working with particular dance forms and with musical counts. In the development of the work I introduced

⁴ See accompanying DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Former Work and Research Workshops and Projects' to view a video of excerpts from a performance of *Mad Scene* at The Place on 8th February 2012.

⁵ Michelle Yim danced Madaleine Trigg's part for *Resolution* at The Place 8th February 2012 and appears on the accompanying DVD.



Fig. 2: Julia Fitzpatrick (with Andrea Walker and Madaleine Trigg) in *Mad Scene*, which evokes wedding imagery in reference to the 'mad scene' in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which is also heard in the performance. December 2011, Chisenhale Dance Space. Photo: Jemima Yong.

them to some training in Butoh in order to slow down some of their movements and shift emphasis onto embodiment techniques. I asked them to relinquish counting in favour of listening to the music, to focus less on rhythm and more on phrasing. In particular I was interested in their responses to listening to the voice, as well as some of the expressive orchestral interjections in the scene. These two aspects of the recording were less attached to musical beats and were more reliant on the interpretation of the singer and conductor correspondingly. This meant dancing with the feel of the music, finding expressiveness through what they heard. Sanjay Roy, in

his review of the performance at The Place in February 2012, was complimentary about the visual elements but found the choreography was too attached to the vocal line.

Daniel Somerville's *Mad Scene* is built on evocative imagery. A dapper Somerville appears with shirt splattered red, sidling forward wanly like a recently shot duck. With a theatrical flourish, he sweeps back the curtain to reveal our cast of characters: a corpse bride in diaphanous white with crimson lips; a white-faced man in a singlet, part pierrot, part ghostly b-boy; a wild, dark-haired woman who flings about her bouquet and veil. Shame about the action, then: having set up the imagery brilliantly, the choreography itself serves mostly to fill out the swooning strains and quivering coloratura of its operatic score. (Roy: 2012)

Though intended as a negative appraisal of the choreography, this observation became a point of departure for me. I realised that in asking the dancers to listen and to embody the music, as well as to address themes and narratives of the original scene and my own experience of 'madness', I was also asking them to experience something of what the singer experiences in performance. They were correspondingly embodying music, plot and character. *Mad Scene* provided a starting point from which to formulate the programme of research.

Roy's review affirmed for me that I wanted to explore the corporeal experience of the opera singer and to witness that embodiment occur in a non-singer. In one regard this desire related to me wanting to understand how, when I perform in my own work, I can be described as being 'operatic' – I wanted to better understand what had led me to being operatic. In another regard I knew that I found the movement of opera singers very beautiful and meaningful in and of itself (literally, sometimes watching opera on DVD with the sound muted) and wondered if this way of moving, extracted from the

singer and placed in the body of the non-singer, might offer new insights to dancers and physical theatre performers – create a new choreographic vocabulary that brought the grounded and stable, yet fluid and constantly vibrating corporeality of the singer to other bodies. There may in this experiment be an opportunity to generate a new kind of movement that goes beyond modern dance explorations of breath such as that of Doris Humphries, or the expansion and contraction inherent in the technique of Martha Graham; a use of breath that embraces the artificiality and constraints of the breath necessary for singing operatically. Within the internal musculature of the opera singer I hoped to find a new language for the moving body and so began my search for the operatic. Where *Mad Scene* perhaps fell short was through my lack of fully understanding the operatic and how to transfer a sense of operaticness to the dancer, it exposed for me a gap in my knowledge which the research could address. I was thus able to formulate an initial research question: What are the physical, practical, theoretical and philosophical conditions that influence the movement of opera singers and therefore what factors are involved in the generation and negotiation of the operatic?

The principal aim of the research became to identify, theorise and describe the operatic as it manifested in movement, specifically in the movement of opera singers as they perform in opera. Understanding what the operatic is and what it does in performance became the route via which I could also better understand the practice I termed Body Opera. The research into opera therefore also aimed to contribute to my understanding

of Body Opera as a movement style. The research aimed to create a vocabulary for firstly describing operatic movement, and also for intentionally engendering it in performance.

Furthermore, there emerged a line of enquiry concerning what physical training opera singers undergo, which was addressed through interviewing singers. Also through physical workshops with singers and dancers which included Butoh techniques, I was able to begin to understand the role of embodiment in operaticness and the movement of singers, while simultaneously observing how the embodiment of images and ideas might be compatible with the other needs and concerns of singers in the performance of opera.

A theoretical framework for the research

Queer theory, within the broader field of postmodern theory and performance practice, was the theoretical framework for the research. I identified within the practice of Butoh and within the performance history and conventions of opera, certain similarities and correspondences that revolve around representations of gender and challenges to heteronormativity, common to postmodern performance practice and queer theory. This position disrupts, disturbs and opposes normative notions of opera as an art form and exposes attempts to obscure opera's subversive potential.

To centralise queer theory in my theoretical framework presents its own challenges. Defining queer is problematic because the concept of queer resists stable definition. Any attempt to capture and fix it is an un-queer act. David Halperin offers the following definition which attempts to navigate this problem.

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. There is nothing in particular to which it refers. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative. (Halperin: 1995, p. 62)

Halperin is one of a number of writers who helped to draw together literature published in the early nineties that together constitute queer theory. Although neither Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)⁶ nor Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990)⁷ uses the term 'queer', in the preface to the 2006 edition of *Epistemology of the Closet* (2006) Sedgwick describes her book, along with Butler's, as being "considered a founding text in queer theory" (2006, p. xvi). In applying queer theory to opera, I am principally referring to these two founding texts plus Butler's *Bodies the Matter* (1993),⁸ which refined some of Butler's points concerning performativity. I am also referencing Michel Foucault's *A History of Sexuality Volume One* (1976) the influence of which is evident in the works of Sedgwick and Butler, particularly in relation to understanding the intersection of sexuality to societal power structures, the discursive construction of binary understandings of sex, gender and gender roles, the potential for new power relations and understandings exemplified by

⁶ Henceforth citations refer to the 2006 edition in the thesis.

⁷ Henceforth citations refer to the 2006 edition in the thesis.

⁸ Henceforth citations refer to the 2011 edition in the thesis.

peripheral sexualities, and the privileging of heterosexuality as a normative and naturalised condition, which should be resisted.

Queer theory, even before it was named as such, developed from concepts expressed in feminist theory, gender studies and lesbian and gay studies, addressing many of the issues common to these disciplines. Robin Griffiths (2006) explains:

Queer Theory is not... an assumed extension of, or departure from, 'lesbian and gay studies' per se, but is more significantly a means of conceptualising the abstract, genealogically fluid conditions through which these 'studies' and 'identities' have evolved (including, of course, those concerning heterosexuality). (Griffiths: 2006, p. 4)

Queer exerts the potential to draw together "disparate sexual identities, viewpoints and cultural artefacts that resist easy assimilation to the 'norm' ... [while also allowing for] a querying (or *queering*) of the stability of such notions of 'normality'" (Griffiths: 2006, p. 4). This potential to draw together the disparate is exemplified in my practice and the diverse influences that I have outlined above. Queer is not therefore another term for homosexuality as its former pejorative usage may have been applied. However, the study of homosexuality did contribute to the formation of queer theory and is a universalising perspective, impacting upon other axes of identity with which it intersects, transforming them (Sedgwick: 2006). The notion of transformation, occurring at the intersection of the axes of identity according to Sedgwick, is analogous to the intersection of creative disciplines and artistic activities in opera. During the research, I identified a transformation of those disciplines, in particular, the transformation of movement with the addition of the orchestra. It is possible to

understand the relations between disciplines as unfixed and in a constantly nascent state and the notion of unfixedness is an important aspect of queer theory and performance practice, while the concept of constant nascency formed part of Lyotard's description of postmodernity (1984). Queer and postmodern perspectives contribute to the repositioning of opera within the thesis as potentially subversive and resistive and therefore also enable me to think of the operatic as sharing qualities with queer.

Hadlock's challenge of 'seeing opera queerly' now that it is already 'out' is met by revisiting the potential of queer perspectives to critique discourses on subjects, as well as the subjects themselves. Seeing 'as an opera queen' is possible when it is understood that the identity of opera queen is itself unfixed and able to re-orientate its positionality *vis-a-vis* the normative. There is not one relation of opera queen to opera, but many, depending on geographical, political and temporal differences. However, what opera queens share is a way of understanding opera in a non-normative way despite the perceived best efforts of the establishment to position opera as heteronormative through the relegation of opera's gender subversions and queer manifestations as mere performance convention. Conventions such as cross-dressing, as in the case of *en travesti* characters (women playing male roles such as Cherubino in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*), are accommodated through the application of the concept of suspended disbelief. The term 'suspension of disbelief' thereby becomes a normalising term with which all subversive gender representation in opera can be dismissed. Cherubino, also a challenge to class hierarchy within the narrative of the

opera, is seemingly stripped of his power to subvert through being viewed as a theatrical conceit. The discourse on opera thereby remains oblivious to the queering potential of such conventions that would otherwise destabilise notions of fixed gender, gender roles and class status.

The field and object of study

The research is interdisciplinary in the sense that academic disciplines of gender, dance, theatre and performance studies are each drawn upon in order to construct my argument. Gender studies offers a theoretical framework with which to proceed, while aspects of dance theory and theatre studies contribute to my understanding of the movement I observed and analysed. In considering how my research might contribute to knowledge I looked firstly to performance studies where I noticed scant reference to European opera. For example, Barba and Savarese's *A Dictionary of Theatre Anthropology* (2005) includes entries on Asian musical theatre traditions and codifications, as well as Western theatre, dance and movement, but makes no mention of the Western tradition of opera. Similarly, Schechner, in *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2002) covers a wide range of subjects suitable for study through the lens of performance studies, including Chinese opera but not European opera. I was mindful then that my thesis, if perceived as contributing to performance studies, may become principally a defence of opera, a cry for recognition of a neglected art form. The study of opera can, I believe, contribute enormously to the discourse on performance and some aspects of this contribution do begin to formulate within my thesis. However,

although my research draws upon a number of fields, and may contribute to more than one, the field of study in which I prefer to situate the research is primarily that of opera studies,⁹ underpinned by the notion that opera studies is necessarily interdisciplinary through opera's engagement with several artistic practices at once.

While opera scholarship has been dominated by musicological and literary analysis, with a more recent interest in scenography and performance, the focus of my research is movement – the corporeal and kinaesthetic elements. There are two reasons for this: firstly because, as described above, movement is the basis for my own practice and secondly, research into the movement of singers represents a new contribution to the field of opera studies. Opera, as examined through the lens of movement and as a kinesthetic phenomenon, does not form part of the existing literature on opera and my research makes a contribution to knowledge through identifying and describing operatic movement and the factors that contribute to it as well as offering methods for collecting and utilising data that bridge the gap between spectatorial and performer positions. The field of opera studies may be enhanced through a deeper understanding of how movement contributes to the art form and to the artistry of the opera singer. Wagner's position on dance reinforces for me the importance of movement to understanding opera:

⁹ The practical outcomes of my research – the performances – also constitute a contribution to knowledge and while they inform the study of movement in opera, also make a contribution beyond opera studies, in the field of movement-based performance.

[Dance] contains the prerequisites for communicating all the performance arts: the singing and speaking human must necessarily be a physical being, the inner, singing and speaking human is visible now through his outer form, now through the movements of his limbs; if we are truly alive to art then since we all have the gift of sight as well as of hearing it is only in the art of dance (mime) that we first understand music and poetry. (Wagner: 1849, p. 29)

It is in the moving body of the singer that the creative disciplines and activities that make up an opera converge and become understandable for Wagner, and for me.

Nicholas Till, in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies* (2012), describes the journey of the academic discipline of opera studies from liberal humanism that assumed the universality of human values in an unhistorical way, to an emergence in the 1990s of perspectives that took account of socio-political intersections and other discourses. Correspondingly the 1990s also sees the emergence of postcolonial and queer theories, each of which have impacted on the study of opera and have contributed to the decentering of heteronormative Euro-centrism. The site of the 'work' is also a major debate within opera studies that is outlined by Till with some early opera scholars seeing the work as fixed in the score and libretto, later scholars introducing the element of scenography and with more recent academics recognising the value of each performance as an iteration of the work. Tom Sutcliffe (1996) also asserts as his premise for commentary on the rise of the director as author, that an opera manifests itself fully only in live performance. "Every production is in a sense a living edition of the work concerned" (1996, p. 10) and we cannot therefore 'read' operas only in the form of their component parts – the libretti and scores. Despite this recognition of the need

to widen our understanding of what opera is and what makes up the 'work', the study of opera remains principally within music schools and music departments.

Having positioned the research within the field of opera studies and through acknowledging that opera is an inherently interdisciplinary subject, I narrowed the interrogation to movement, but was therefore forced to recognise a further series of disciplinary intersections. The fields of dance, movement studies, performance studies and acting would each be drawn upon in order to understand the movement I was observing, and recreating, as each of these potentially formed an aspect of training for the opera singer and therefore contributed to the influences interacting in the negotiation of the operatic. Therefore, I limited the range of the research through identifying the object of study more specifically as the operatic movement of opera singers as I observed it at the time of the research.¹⁰ This constituted the search for the operatic which I refer to in the thesis title and recognised that the quality of movement that I am referring to as operatic can exist outside the performance of opera, in my own movement practice, for example. Hence what I research is the operatic in opera through observation of opera singers and through experimentation within Body Opera, my practice.

Historical attempts have been made to codify movement and gesture for opera performers and literature does exist on this topic as explored by Smart (2004). The purpose of this research was not an attempt to recreate a genealogy of movement

¹⁰ The task of developing criteria for the identification of operatic movement is explored in Chapter One: Methodology.

styles throughout the history of opera, although some acknowledgement of the existence of period styles was necessary as it formed part of the responses of interviewees. Furthermore some of the practical investigations that formed part of the research drew on existing attempts to codify operatic gestures. In particular I am referring to my work *French Collection*, which took as a choreographic starting point the codified gestures developed by George Shea in *Acting in Opera* (1915). As an experiment in movement however, this did not aim to prove or disprove the efficacy of his codification but allowed me to understand how these codified gestures related to my own interrogation of the operatic through my movement practice and as I observed it in performances of opera singers. To avoid situating the research in terms of historical forms of movement, the objects of study were not therefore specific period styles, composers, operas, eras or directorial styles. While I acknowledge that such variables exist, this thesis focuses on identifying operatic movement, as a discrete entity, as it manifested at the time of the study, without any preconception of what it meant to be operatic. I did not, to be more specific, assume that the 'larger than life', 'overacted', 'histrionic' or 'melodramatic' gestures stereotypically assigned to opera singers (and referred to by interview respondents and workshop participants) are the sole manifestation of operaticness. These were perceived rather as residues of past attempts to capture and codify operatic movement. This idea was affirmed during interviews with singers and through experiments in movement workshops. The operatic under interrogation is not limited to the 'larger than life' gestures mentioned, but goes some way to explaining how they operate.

In order to focus outcomes but acknowledge possible temporal and geographical variables, the object of study was therefore limited to the practice of opera singers as it was observed in productions that occurred in England and Wales during the research period. Awareness that these observations were inevitably framed by observation of opera performances on DVD (international and UK productions) and recollections of live opera productions witnessed by the researcher prior to the research period is acknowledged. The movement practice of singers under scrutiny and any findings relating to the identification of operaticness in movement might then be tentatively extrapolated to other places and times, given that opera is evidently an art-form in which practitioners frequently travel internationally, and in which they often enjoy long careers. The operaticness observed may have been present or developing over the decades prior to the research period. With this in mind a more nuanced initial question might be phrased: What is operatic movement as it was performed at the time the research was conducted and what are the factors that influenced its generation and negotiation? This formulation also takes into account the potentially shifting and unfixed nature of the operatic but conversely also provides a fixed point against which those shifts may be measured.

Overview of the thesis

I used an inductive approach which “may be seen as problem posing ... a search for the right questions ... as well as their answers” (McNiff: 1988, p.5). I sought emergent themes as the research unfolded that related to my central enquiry.

The rest of the written thesis is divided into five chapters and a conclusion. At the close of each chapter examples of practice are presented in dialogue with the preceding content of the chapter and theoretical concerns are discussed alongside issues raised in the practice, and at these points the reader is invited to view documentation of examples of practice provided on DVD.¹¹ The structure of the thesis thereby references several operatic models of structure with influences from Baroque and Grand Opera: the introduction and chapter on methodology acting as overture and prologue, followed by four acts and an epilogue (the conclusion) each separated by an event which may be thought of as a divertissement, ballet, interlude or perhaps, to use Robert Wilson’s more contemporary term from *Einstein on the Beach* (1975), a knee-play.

The sections concerning the examples of practice are not intended to offer an analysis of the practice, but rather act as contextual information relating to theory or methodology explored in the example, such as one might find in a programme accompanying a performance – a framework through which to view the performance.

¹¹ See DVD ‘Daniel Somerville: Practice’ for video documentation. Photographic images from the examples of practice are presented throughout the written component to complement and supplement the documentation on DVD. While the images are sometimes included to illustrate particular points from the main body of the text, others are included to enhance the experience of encountering the research through providing evocative visual stimuli for contemplation of the operatic.

The practice itself, as represented through video documentation on DVD and still images throughout the written component of the thesis, is not designed to merely illustrate points of theory or findings of the research, but rather it participates in the generation of the argument, replacing text-based analysis and working in dialogue with the written thesis as is appropriate in practice-based research, a point explored in Chapter One: Methodology. The examples of practice contribute to a sense in which the thesis may be thought of as a performative experience and engagement with it may be enjoyed for its operatic qualities as well as academic content.

In Chapter One: Methodology I discuss how the research is situated as practice-based research. The positionality of the researcher as an opera queen is expanded upon and I explore how the criteria for identifying operaticness in movement were developed. I discuss issues relating to the primary research activities and the selection of operas and singers included in the research. In order to answer the research question (What are the physical, practical, theoretical and philosophical conditions that influence the movement of opera singers and therefore what factors are involved in the generation and negotiation of the operatic?) three lines of enquiry were followed and three findings are discussed. The first line of enquiry concerns the training of singers in movement and the negotiation of the operatic in the relationship between singer and director. Chapter Two: Performing Opera begins by addressing the first line of enquiry through presenting the outcomes of interviews conducted with singers on this topic and through examples taken from the observation of opera rehearsals. This chapter also introduces

the process of applying queer theory to the examination of opera. The second line of enquiry, an experiment to see if the operatic could be engendered in the non-singing body, begins in Chapter Three: Embodiment, which groups together research activities, such as workshops and a project with dancers. The chapter begins however, by clarifying the use of the term 'embodiment' in the context of the practice. Chapter Four: Operatic Emergence continues the third line of enquiry, which involves the application of queer theory as a theoretical framework for examining opera. This chapter also begins to discuss the findings of the research by answering the question of how operaticness manifests, if not through being consciously performed. Two remaining findings of the research are explored in Chapter Five: Empathy, in which kinaesthetic empathy is posited as the mechanism for the transfer of operaticness from one artist to another in the absence of a formal pedagogy and as a mechanism inherent in the processes of an opera queen's kinaesthetic response to opera. The value of an opera queen's perspective is then discussed as a way to transfer the sensibility of the singer in opera to the non-singing performer. The Conclusion draws together the research findings and discusses the ways in which they answer the research question. In the final section the contribution to knowledge is discussed.

Chapter One: Methodology

{Prologue}

In this chapter I discuss several issues relating to methodology, including contextualising the research as practice-based research. I also revisit the topic of my positionality as an opera queen. I will also discuss the criteria for identifying operatic movement and how those criteria were developed. I will outline the research activities, offering the reasoning behind the choices of operas and singers that were included in the research. I will also highlight the aims of other research activities that were undertaken. This chapter is intended to offer a clear understanding of the programme of research that was developed in order to address the research question, and lines of enquiry, presented in the introduction.

Practice-based research

The written component of the thesis is accompanied by documentation of the practice which was developed and undertaken during the research period.¹ Some of these performances were presented as part of postgraduate researcher presentations at the University of Wolverhampton (Walsall) on 4th November 2012 and 4th November 2013. On the first of these occasions I presented *French Collection* (2012), *Mozart solo No. 1* (2012) and *Trio xxx* (2012). The following year I presented *Mozart Movement Study* (2013), and *Admiring La Stupenda* (2013). In addition, two other works which form part of the study were created and presented outside the university, *The Canterbury Masque* (2013) at the University of

¹ DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Practice'.

Kent on 27th January 2013 and *Butterfly Ghost* (2013) at Chisenhale Dance Space in London on 5th April 2013.

The creation of performance works was an opportunity to test ideas generated through observation during the field studies and within the workshops and other projects undertaken. The practice also gave rise to further questions and highlighted new directions for the research. This reciprocal relation of practice to research adheres to Matthew Reason's description, whereby, "practice-based research describes research that occurs within and through the *doing* of arts making" (2012, p. 195). The research informed my practice but there was an equivalent reciprocation whereby my practice (including the process of generating it) played an integral role in the research, as a crucible and generator of ideas.

Reason (2012) also describes how forms of knowing such as embodied and tacit knowledge can be generated through arts practice. I have extended this notion to include how firstly tacit and embodied knowledge might be better understood, explored and tested through my arts practice. Within my research, the tacit understanding of operaticness I describe in the introduction and the sense in which the opera queen embodies the operatic were key ideas that I would come to call upon in making my argument. It was through arts practice that I was able to experientially know the value of these positions and thereby, "advance a notion of embodied knowledge through art" as Reason suggests (2012). The viability of operatic movement as a discrete way of moving was tested through intentionally extracting it from the action of singing and thereby understanding the ways in which

operatic movement is more than a response to the physical effort of singing. The creation of movement works utilising my own body and the bodies of other performers in performances was an important testing ground for my ideas relating to opera and operaticness. These ideas were generated from observation and analysis of opera singers and through encountering relevant theoretical and philosophical literature.

Researcher positionality

The opera queen is not perceived within the research as a closeted homosexual man who directs his erotic energy into a love of opera and who uses the visceral experience of opera and the possibility of the adoration of the forbidden other as a substitute for erotic expression, as was the case for Koestenbaum (1993). The opera queen is repositioned as a fully realised and out gay man who is in touch with his sexuality and the inherent eroticism of opera – a person with agency, a reader of opera who understands the potential of a queer perspective, who appreciates the art form and its camp, sometimes ironic, artificiality along with its deeply emotional, philosophical and politically subversive potential. The opera queen seeks to see through the normative facade that opera presents. He seeks to see through the narratives, the stories², the music and the production and allows all the elements to interact and transform each other – elements that include his own life experience, his perception of fellow audience members, the lives of singers, the significance of the occasion, the scandals and the ovations, the performance history, the

² I am making a distinction between plot (the sequence of events presented on stage), story (the world of opera including the events of the plot) and the narrative (the plot and story as seen in terms of structure – applying therefore not only to plot and story of the text – libretto – but also that of the music – score – as well as elements of the scenography and stage craft, which may have their own narrative values and contributions).

circumstances of the creation of the work, the lives of the authors and the wink of the barman in the interval. All these elements coalesce in the opera house and each is an aspect of the operatic experience. Perhaps most importantly to my analysis of movement, this opera queen seeks to be attuned to the significance of the gestures of the singer; to expression of character along with the often subtle signals of virtuosity and indications of physical endurance, those signs that the singer is performing, alongside the nuances of character and exposition of plot.

The journey of self-realisation as an opera queen and to understanding what type of opera queen I am was one of the first tasks of the research. As discussed above the research was inductive and qualitative in nature and methodologies were adapted according to context. The study began with the body at the heart of the practice, which is my own body. In the initial phase of the research I considered my approach akin to heuristic methodological processes described by Clark Moustakis (1990). Heuristic studies are usually used to explain human experiences such as loneliness, or to understand connectedness, or grief (Moustakis: 1990). My first task was to consider in what way opera was already an internalised, embodied phenomenon for me and the result of this approach was that I recognised and employed the identity of the opera queen as a position from which to proceed.

It is important to consider however, when taking such a position, whether this creates a minoritising or universalising account of the subject, as discussed by Sedgwick (2006). Is an opera queen's perspective useful only to other opera queens and queer theorists or is it a universal perspective useful more generally in the

analysis of opera and the operatic? When asking a similar question of homosexuality Sedgwick finds that a minoritising perspective sees issues of homosexuality as only pertinent to a minority of people who are themselves homosexual, while a universalising perspective understands how the issues surrounding the existence, labelling and legitimising of homosexuality runs through society at all levels creating an axis and a language that transforms other perspectives (2006, p. 3). An opera queen's perspective on opera may decentre heteronormative understandings of the art form and its constituent operas and thereby offer fresh perspectives from which to examine opera and reinterpret the works. Such perspectives may also uncover how heteronormative society might be perceived as having obscured opera's subversive potential as an art form. My view, hearsay from decades of informal discussion, is that opera has been perceived as conservative, pro-establishment and elitist, while its anti-establishment, gender queering and subversive performance strategies and storylines have been relegated to mere convention and habit, something to amuse rather than to challenge.

Koestenbaum (1993) illustrates just how interrelated and personal opera is for opera queens through his illuminating comments on the body of the opera fan, the queer gaze and the experience of queers in relation to opera. These revelations confirmed my thinking with regard to identifying as queer and initiated a process of identifying opera as queer – the self and opera colliding in the form of an internalised, already fully integrated opera queen. This identity label was not adopted in order to restrict, contain or fix a sense of self however. The identity of opera queen was not

perceived as stable but as subject to construction within cultural and historical contexts.

Sam Abel (1996) and Paul Robinson (2002) both continue Koestenbaum's investigation of the question of why some gay men love opera and make reformulations of opera queens within cultural and political contexts. Both present more positive, post gay liberation models. The erotic and sometimes sexual nature of the experience of opera which Koestenbaum infers is made more explicit by Abel: "Without sex, opera loses its unique place in the world stage. Opera legitimizes the illegitimate, makes sexual transgressions acceptable" (Abel: 1996, p. 186). Robinson adds further to the discourse through an analysis of the diva, and the diva's voice as location of transgression and therefore of identification for gay men. These two positions, gay identification and the explicit eroticism of opera were aspects which I explored through practice in *Trio xxx*, which is discussed in further detail in Practice One: *Trio xxx*, at the close of this chapter.

The opera queen is not therefore a single fixed identity – there are multiple manifestations of queens with different relationships to opera. Through the research I was brought closer to understanding the kind of opera queen that I am, and the opera queen that I discovered, appeared to be closer to the 'out' post gay liberation models of Abel and Robinson and initially differed radically from Koestenbaum's characterisation: "The opera queen a prissy librarian, a fussy knowledge monger, a fact policeman... with toupee, a lisp, a pinkie ring, a poodle, a leather jacket, and a boyfriend twenty years his junior who knows nothing about opera" (1993, p. 35).

Reflection on this illuminated how this identity is subject to the legal and social status and acceptance of homosexuality more broadly. As Koestenbaum highlights:

We consider the opera queen to be a pre-Stonewall³ throwback because we homophobically devalue opera love as addictive behaviour and as displaced eroticism. The opera queen is a dated species: very 1950s. (1993, p. 31)

Koestenbaum thereby positions the identity of the opera queen as manifesting in a culture of non-disclosure and the secrecy of the closet. Growing up as a teenager in the 1980s meant that I was exposed to two extremes, the sexually conservative politics, homophobic discourse and restrictive legislation of the Thatcher government on one hand and the gender-bending postmodernism of pop culture and a growing and vocal gay rights and gay pride movement on the other. I was therefore subject to both positive and negative reinforcements of homosexuality as a young person. The point at which I discovered opera was as a late teenager, by which time I was a young gay man, not the closeted or prissy opera queen of Koestenbaum but not yet fully the liberated model of Abel and Robinson either – still harbouring memories of bullying, still subject to legal discrimination and exercising caution in many social circumstances. The opera house however, was a place of refuge, a safe space in which to indulge in a love of opera and not so infrequently meet other gay men. The erotic nature of opera was often reinforced by the sexual outcomes of attending opera. The opera house was, and continues to be, a space in which two very different worlds co-exist – a conservative, pro-establishment temple of elitist high art in which another world of lingering looks, smiles, winks and glances go undetected other than by those who know that it is also a meeting place, social and sexual, for gay men. There are aspects of the opera queen identity and experience as

³ The Stonewall riots in 1969 were a flashpoint in the gay liberation movement, widely credited with being a watershed in the movement, creating visibility and ultimately leading to decriminalisation in the USA.

described by Koestenbaum on which I disagree, but however different my manifestation of the opera queen is from that which he exemplifies, we do not differ, in one important aspect – our corporeal experience of listening to live opera.

A singer's voice sets up vibrations and resonances in the listener's body. First, there are the physiological sensations we call "hearing." Second, there are gestures of response with which the listener mimics the singer, expresses physical sympathy, appreciation, or exaltation: shudder, gasp, sigh; holding the body motionless, relaxing the shoulders, stiffening the spine. Third, the singer has presence, an expressive relation to her body – and presence is contagious. I catch it... listening restores queer embodiment... Listening, your heart is in your throat: *your* throat, not the diva's.

(Koestenbaum: 1993, p. 42)

Listening to opera as an opera queen is a visceral and erotic experience that blurs the boundaries of bodies. We are moved by the voice and though we remain silent and motionless we share the anguish of the singer and the character. While sat in the opera house we are both insider (having an understanding of the multiple functions and characters of the space, feeling a sense of empathy for both singer and fellow gay opera lovers) and outsider (concealed, discreet and non-conformist among the heteronormative establishment). These ideas, and others, relating to the opera queen, form the basis of *Admiring La Stupenda* which explores the epistemology of the opera queen [See Fig. 3]. *Admiring La Stupenda* is the last work that I discuss in the thesis and acts as a culmination of the research, being autobiographical, delivered from the position of opera queen and also engaging with and demonstrating findings concerning operatic movement (see Practice Seven: *Admiring La Stupenda*).



Fig. 3: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*. In the domesticity of a remembered bedsit, evoked through storytelling, an emergent opera queen carves out the arc of an operatic voice with his hand, while addressing the audience from his bed. November 2013. The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

Criteria for identifying operatic movement

In order to undertake the research, which involved identifying and describing operatic movement, I developed criteria with which I could categorise movements and gestures as operatic. My positionality as an opera queen played a role in this process. Koestenbaum's premise that we move along with the singer, somehow feel the way in which they move even though we remain in our seats, resonates with the notion of kinaesthetic empathy. "[T]he mirror mechanism ... unifies action production and action observation, allowing the understanding of the actions of others from the inside" (Reason & Reynolds: 2012, p. 19). As I observed singers during the research I 'moved' with them – sometimes quite literally. In the rehearsal

room for example, I was able to discreetly make a similar gesture at the time, but also, even when motionless in the theatre, my brain was, through the mirror mechanism, activated in such a way as to understand the movement and the sensitivity which drove it, according to Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia (in Reason & Reynolds: 2012, p. 19). Observing singers at work meant that I was in a corporeal relation through the recognition of the role of mirror neurons in kinaesthetic empathy. It follows that I was therefore able to filter those movements which were consciously performed as an aspect of directed action from those which were spontaneous or involuntary, undertaken as a result of the physical effort of singing or in response to a sensitivity towards opera recognisable to the opera queen. My experience of attending opera over several decades combined with the research I had undertaken, that included detailed observation of movement that I could repeat in the studio, meant that I was able to differentiate movements according to what motivated them. I needed to filter directed action from movement generated by the singer which may be seen as their contribution, separate from the demands of the directed movement to know if operatic movement was occurring in ways other than through being directed.

I developed two criteria for initially identifying a movement as operatic. Firstly, was it found in opera and generated as a result of being performed in opera? (The physical effort and breathing required for singing operatically for example). Secondly, was it repeated in the bodies of different singers (and not just the personal 'ticks' or habit of an individual singer)? Furthermore, within the theses,

I will consider how movements adhering to these criteria may be read as non-normative or queer for the purpose of this study.

The first criterion pertains to movements affected by the physical effort of singing operatically. The need for diaphragmatic support and an uninterrupted flow of air causes the body to be held with a straight spine but relaxed shoulders and neck for example. This attention to posture for the practical purpose of producing the right sound means that singers adopt strategies for negotiating the need to make stage actions alongside the primary requirement, which is to sing.

The second criterion narrows the range of the first because in some cases singers develop habits within this negotiation, which are not always necessary for producing the sound or the action. If however a movement strategy is shared among singers and it pertains to the need to move while singing then it may be regarded as a strategy particular to opera and may therefore be termed operatic.

Not all operatic movements and gestures are linked to the practical aspects of singing however. There is a group of commonly performed gestures and ways of moving that go beyond posture and singing technique. These concern the ways in which a performer might make a movement of the arm, for example, that follows the arc of the phrasing within the music, beginning and ending with the sound of the musical instruments. This group of gestures and ways of moving are of particular interest because they are not normative ways of moving – they contain elements of artifice.

Artifice and exaggeration are associated with (though not limited to) the term camp and for Moe Meyer (1994) camp is the outward manifestation of queer. Susan Sontag (1964) assigns certain qualities to the term camp which can also be applied to opera: exaggerated, artificial, naive, the world as aesthetic phenomenon and 'Being-as-Playing-a-Role'. Sontag even names the operas of Bellini and Richard Strauss as examples of camp. The problem with Sontag's presentation of camp as a 'sensibility' was that, according to Meyer (1994, pp. 7-20), it conflated ideas of camp with pop and kitsch sidelining homosexuality from the equation. Meyer reclaims camp as the outward manifestation of queerness bringing the possibility of non-normative sexuality back into the equation. Under this new relationship of camp to queer we can view the camp-ness of opera as evoking queerness, allowing us to read opera as queer when it is camp or artificial, which considering the artificiality of singing as a mode of communication, enables a broad reading of the art form as potentially queer.

Opera and queer are not only defined or characterised by campness. The term queer may also be evoked when a gesture or movement is simply non-naturalistic, self-conscious or performed in a knowing way that gestures towards its own position as part of the performance matrix. Movements, within the context of a naturalistic production, for example, not generated as a result of character, motivation or plot but through some other impulse such as a response to the mood or phrasing of the music, or to the physical effort of singing also become signifiers of a kind of artificiality that signal towards the metanarrative of operatic culture and invoke a kind of Brechtian awareness of play and player. The interplay between the

performed and the performer in the body of the singer creates an oscillation of attention for the viewer, between the world of the opera and the world of the opera house. The binary opposition of fantasy and reality is thereby bridged and transgressed as Zuccarini (2014) suggests (see Introduction) and a strategy akin to queerness is made visible in the movement of a singer.

With criteria in place for identifying operatic movement I developed a programme of research activities in order to observe and describe operaticness in more detail. Alongside observation, interviews were conducted and the data gathered was then processed through experiments in workshops and through making performances.

Research activities

The research activities can be grouped into three categories.

1. The collecting of qualitative data through:
 - a) The observation of opera singers in rehearsal and performance and the making of notes on, and sketches of operatic movement.
 - b) Interviews with opera singers.
2. Experiments testing initial findings from the data collection in the form of:
 - a) Workshops with singers, other performers and non-performers.
 - b) A project with two student dancers using the notes and sketches.
3. The making and presentation of performances, discussed above (see p. 38).

This research pattern may be understood sequentially as: data gathering through field studies, experimentation through physical workshops, and the rehearsal and

performance of new works generated through that pattern: data gathering, experiment, practice. In this research cycle, data gathering through observation and interview, experimentation and the creation of practice, all constitute research. Each type of activity is also supported by engagement with critical writing and the application of theory. In the case of experimentation and practice, these may also reflect upon, as well as explore, critical writing and theory. Analysis and evaluation of practice leads back to the ongoing data gathering through observation and interviews within the cycle, and further experimentation and practice is thus generated.

The interview schedule was created after observations of singers in rehearsal had begun and was designed to generate a conversation in which issues of posture, movement and gesture may be separated out and interrogated as discrete aspects of movement training and practice. This was done in order to avoid too general a discussion of movement in opera as well as to allow interviewees to assess and disclose where operaticness may reside in movement for them as individual interpretive artists. Each section of the interview schedule is presented as a series of questions including multiple choice where interviewees choose from an odd number of answers on a scale (including a neutral central option), so as to avoid leading interviewees or pre-empting answers. The questions begin with training and then go on to explore movement as it is experienced in the rehearsal and performance of operas. The inductive nature of the research meant that questions were structured in order to directly address observations that were being made and this therefore also meant that answers by initial interviewees affected the way in

which observations were approached and gradually refined the focus of the study to the moment where the orchestra is introduced into rehearsal.

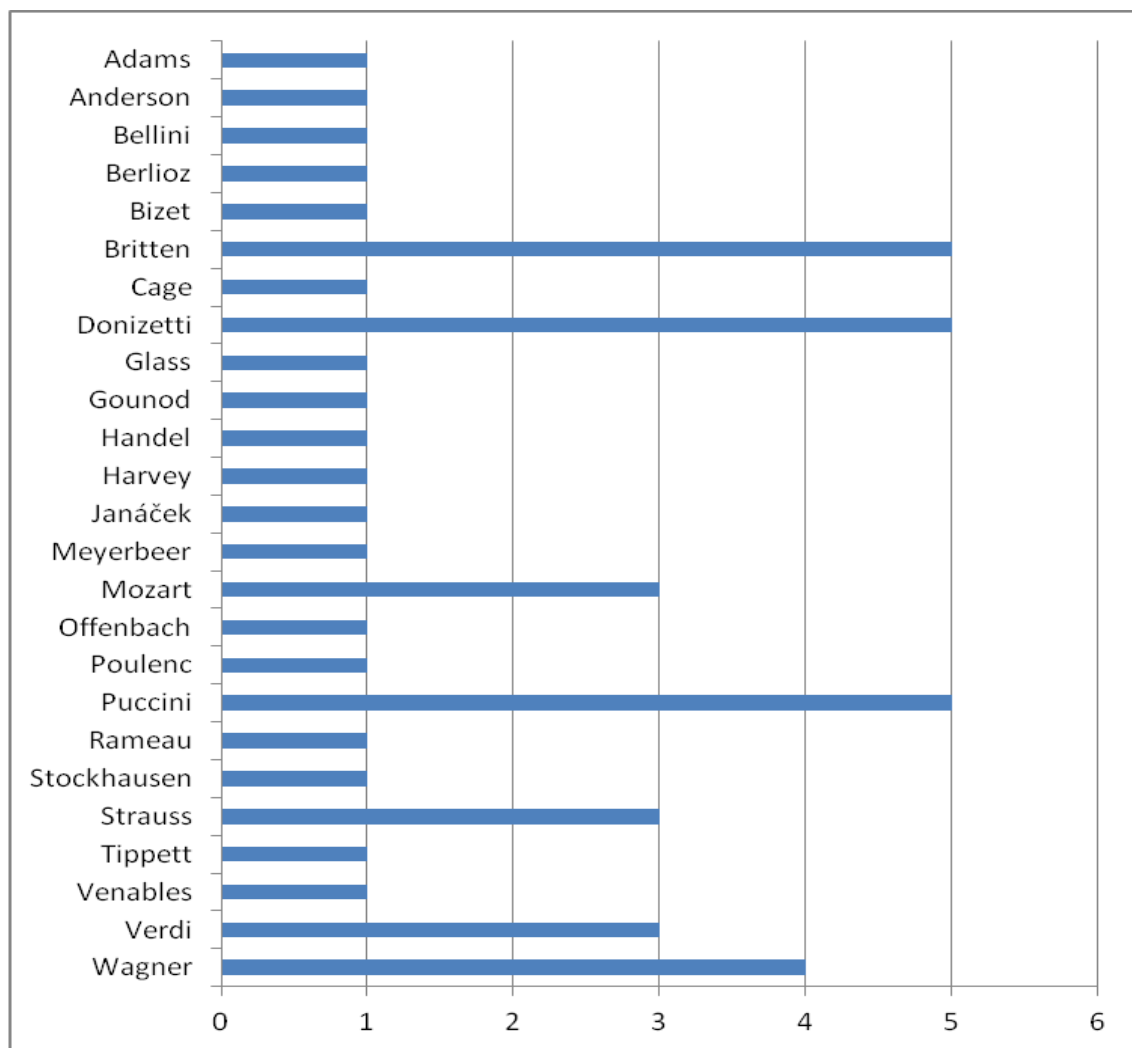
Observing singers

In order to avoid situating a notion of the operatic within one style or period of opera the choices of productions attended aimed to be a representative sample of opera activity and repertoire across England and Wales during the research period.⁴

The following charts demonstrate the wide selection of opera productions encountered which includes thirty nine operas seen live or through live relay, and the seven productions where I had access to the rehearsals.

The following composer breakdown chart illustrates the range of composers included and shows which were more frequently encountered. The research period coincided with the bicentenary celebrations of Wagner (1813-1883) and Verdi (1813-1901), the centenary celebration of Britten (1913-1976) and the 150th anniversary of the birth of Richard Strauss. Accordingly these composers feature prominently alongside perennial favourites such as Mozart (1756-1791), Donizetti (1797-1848) and Puccini (1858-1924).

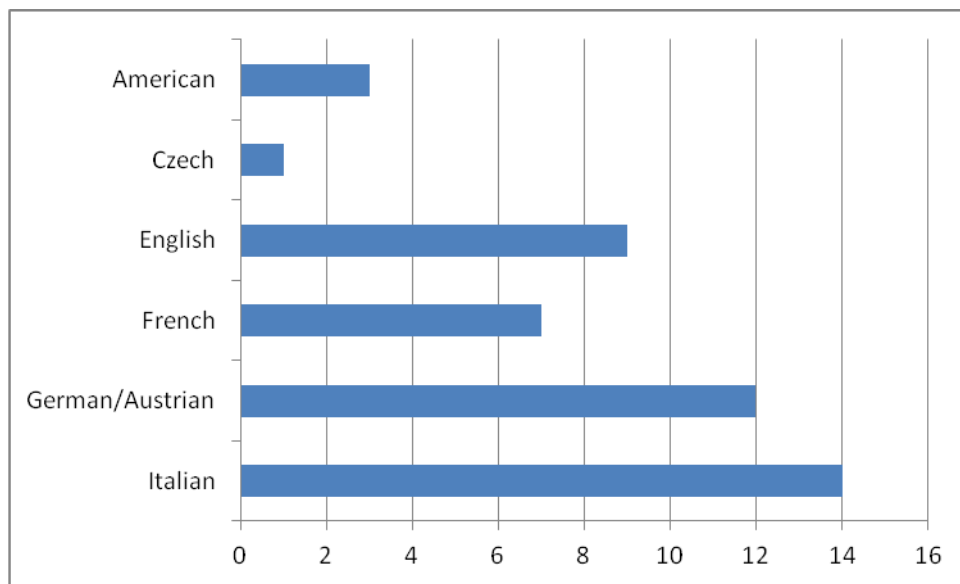
⁴ The list in Appendix 1: Operas Attended, includes operas encountered during the period of writing up as well as those encountered during the formal research period. Continued exposure to opera as an aspect of research thereby informed the processing, as well as collecting, of data and extended the period of exposure to opera and the operatic to include time spent writing the thesis.



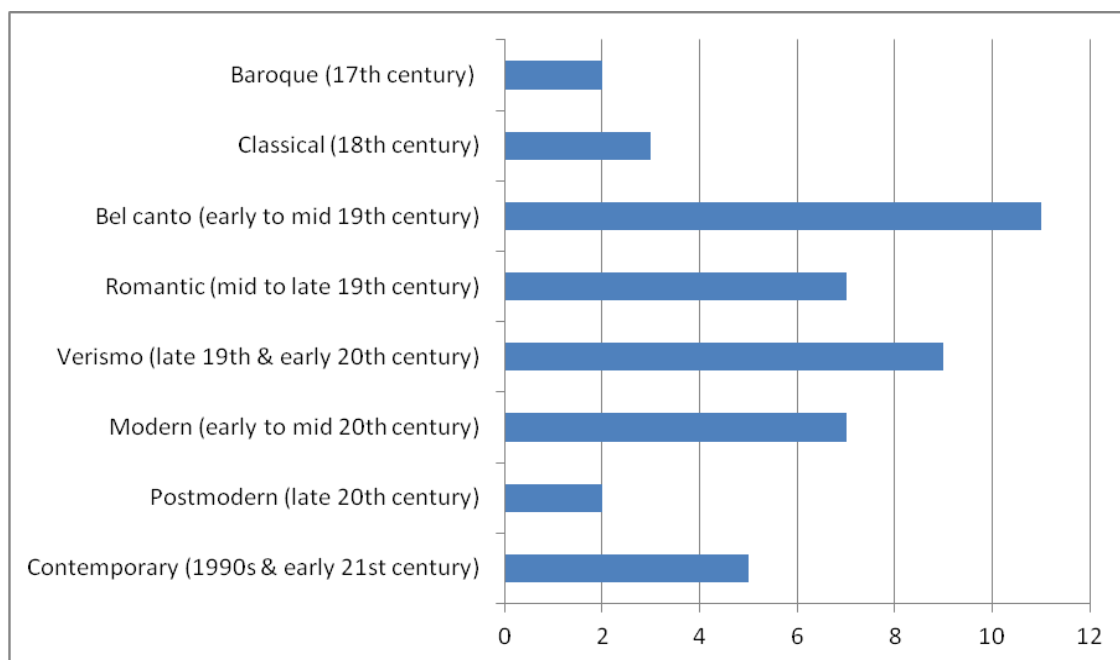
The above list can be grouped according to school⁵ and period style (overleaf), again demonstrating variety and thus avoiding situating the search for the operatic within one or other school or style of opera.

⁵ The grouping of operas within national schools is undertaken according to the precedent found in *The Dictionary of Opera & Operetta* (Anderson: 1989).

Breakdown by national school of opera



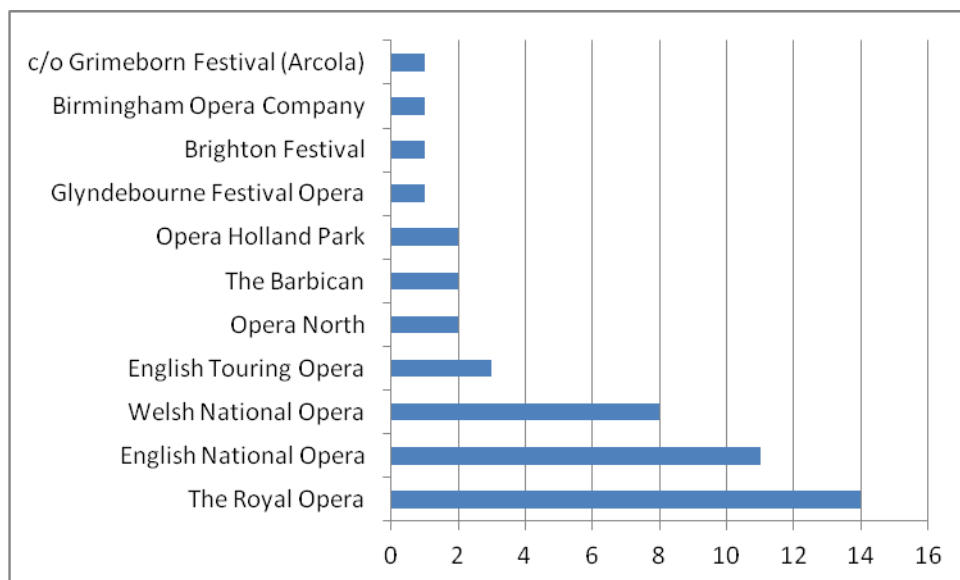
Breakdown by period style (international)



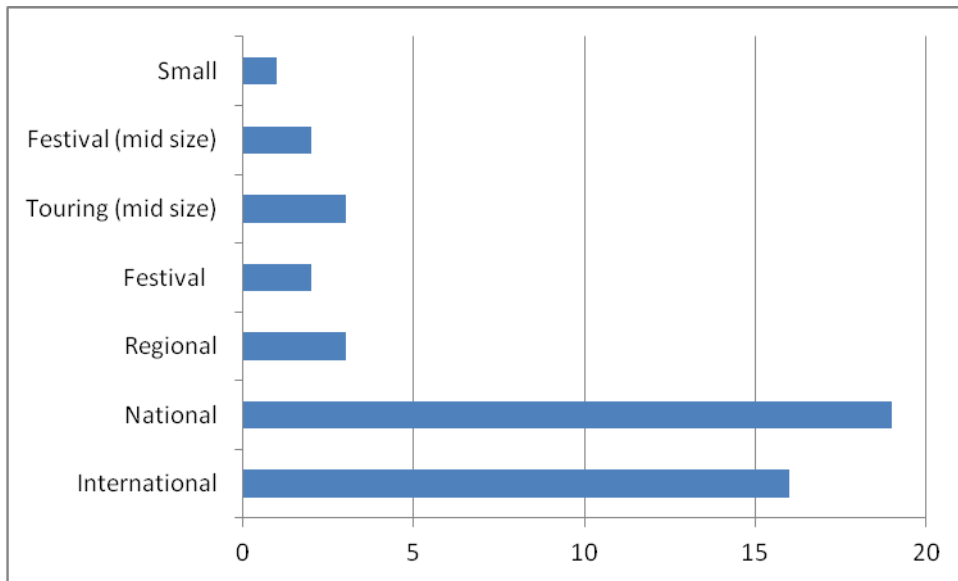
Although these charts demonstrate variety, they also reflect how Italian 19th and early 20th century repertoire is more frequently encountered, with Germanic, French and English opera of the same time frame making up the majority of the rest of the repertoire. This pattern reflects a common trend in the programming of opera in England and Wales at the time of the study.

The selection of opera companies included in the research also aimed to reflect a range of company sizes and types in order to demonstrate that the operatic may occur across different types of companies, or to expose correlations between the type of company (and therefore the singers employed in those companies) and the occurrence of operaticness. This is not however any reflection or pre-judgement of quality of production or individual singer's performance, which, regardless of company size and status, succeeds or not on its own merits.

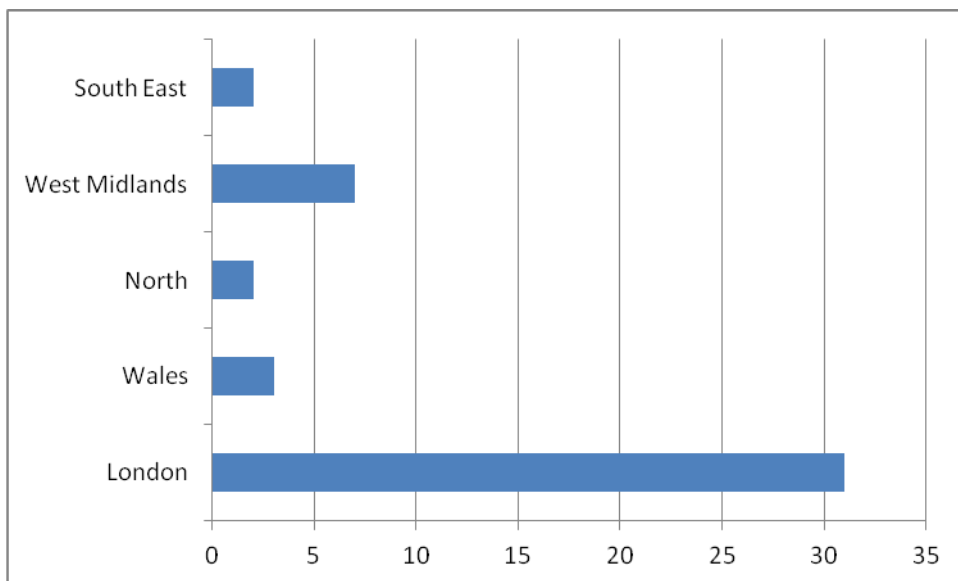
Company breakdown



These companies may be grouped according to company size and type.



Productions witnessed by these companies may also be grouped according to geographical location.



These charts are intended to critique the selection of companies. Representing all the companies encountered whether through a single performance or through a

longer period of scrutiny via observerships⁶ for example, appears, despite the inclusion of smaller companies, to demonstrate the predominance of international and national companies within the research. Similarly the breakdown by location of the performance shows a weighting towards productions in London. However, a more comprehensive survey of all the opera activity in England and Wales at the time of the research would show a much higher concentration of activity among smaller companies and performances outside London. Therefore represented only in this way the companies and activity included in the research cannot claim to be representative.

To address this issue I highlight that four of the companies included in the research allowed access to the rehearsals of seven of the productions. This aspect of the research occupied a far greater amount of time and allowed for more detailed observation of singers as they prepared their roles. The chart below illustrates the varying levels of access to rehearsal for the observerships of these productions.⁷

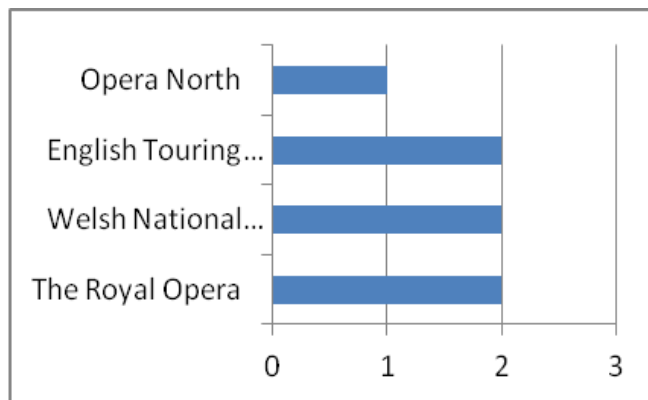
⁶ The term 'observership' is used widely in the context of opera rehearsal denoting an opportunity for a person to observe the director as a form of apprenticeship. I am using the term in relation to the field studies that involved having access to rehearsals in order to observe singers and their relationship to the director in terms of how movement was negotiated.

⁷ See Appendix 2: A Note on Opera Rehearsals, for comments on rehearsal structure and vocabulary concerning opera rehearsals that is used throughout the thesis.

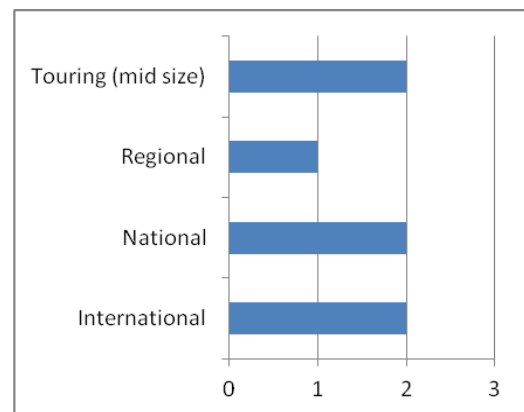
Company	Opera	Studio Rehearsals	Stage Piano Rehearsals	Stage Orchestra Rehearsals	Dress Rehearsal	Performance
English Touring Opera	<i>Simon Boccanegra</i> (Verdi, 1857)	London Spring 2013	London Hackney Empire Spring 2013	London Hackney Empire Spring 2013	London Hackney Empire Spring 2013	Wolverhampton Grand Theatre Spring 2013
English Touring Opera	<i>L'assedio di Calais</i> (Donizetti, 1836)	London Spring 2013	London Hackney Empire Spring 2013	London Hackney Empire Spring 2013	London Hackney Empire Spring 2013	London Hackney Empire Spring 2013
Welsh National Opera	<i>Lohengrin</i> (Wagner, 1848)		Cardiff Wales Millennium Centre Spring 2013	Cardiff Wales Millennium Centre Spring 2013	Cardiff Wales Millennium Centre Spring 2013	Birmingham Hippodrome Summer 2013
The Royal Opera	<i>La rondine</i> (Puccini, 1916)		London Royal Opera House Summer 2013	London Royal Opera House Summer 2013	London Royal Opera House Summer 2013	London 'Big Screen' Canary Wharf Summer 2013
The Royal Opera	<i>Tosca</i> (Puccini, 1899)		London Royal Opera House Summer 2013	London Royal Opera House Summer 2013	London Royal Opera House Summer 2013	London 'Big Screen' Canary Wharf Summer 2013
Welsh National Opera	<i>Anna Bolena</i> (Donizetti, 1830)	Cardiff Wales Millennium Centre Autumn 2013	Cardiff Wales Millennium Centre Autumn 2013	Cardiff Wales Millennium Centre Autumn 2013	Cardiff Wales Millennium Centre Autumn 2013	Birmingham Hippodrome Autumn 2013
Opera North	<i>Peter Grimes</i> (Britten, 1945)		Leeds Grand Theatre & Opera House Autumn 2013	Leeds Grand Theatre & Opera House Autumn 2013	Leeds Grand Theatre & Opera House Autumn 2013	

Considering the increased involvement of these companies in the research and the greater amount of time and attention given to these productions, a further series of charts redresses the balance in terms of company representation and geographical location.

Company breakdown – observerships

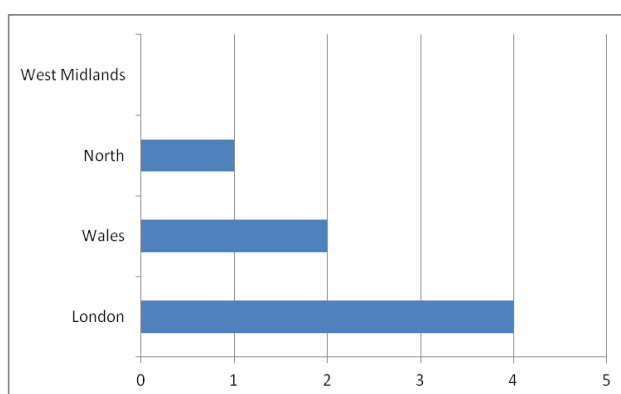


Company size and type

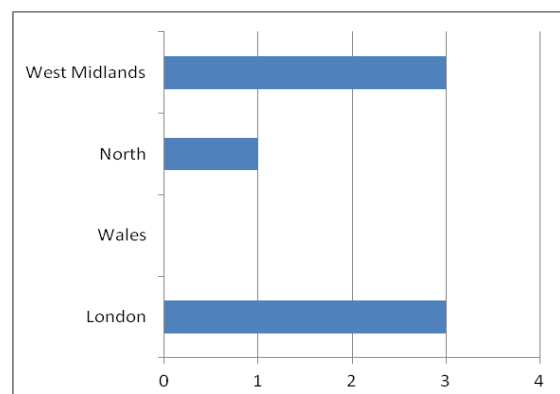


When considering the location of the activity I have made a distinction between rehearsal and performance as the English Touring Opera and Welsh National Opera productions were seen in performances at locations other than where they were rehearsed. This addresses the issue of London-centricity in the previous charts and demonstrates the inclusion of productions in the West Midlands, where the institution supporting the research is based.

Location of rehearsals



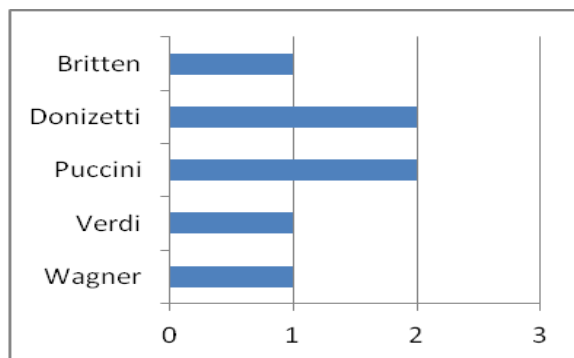
Location of productions



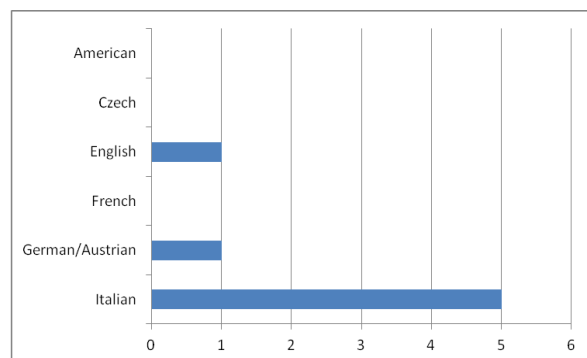
Correspondingly the composer breakdown also alters when the observerships are considered alone. Here the variety of styles encountered overall becomes important

to consider, demonstrating how the research was representative and did not restrict the search for the operatic to one style or another. The charts below demonstrate that the observerships addressed the core repertoire encountered during the research period, as illustrated in the overall charts above (see pp. 51-56).

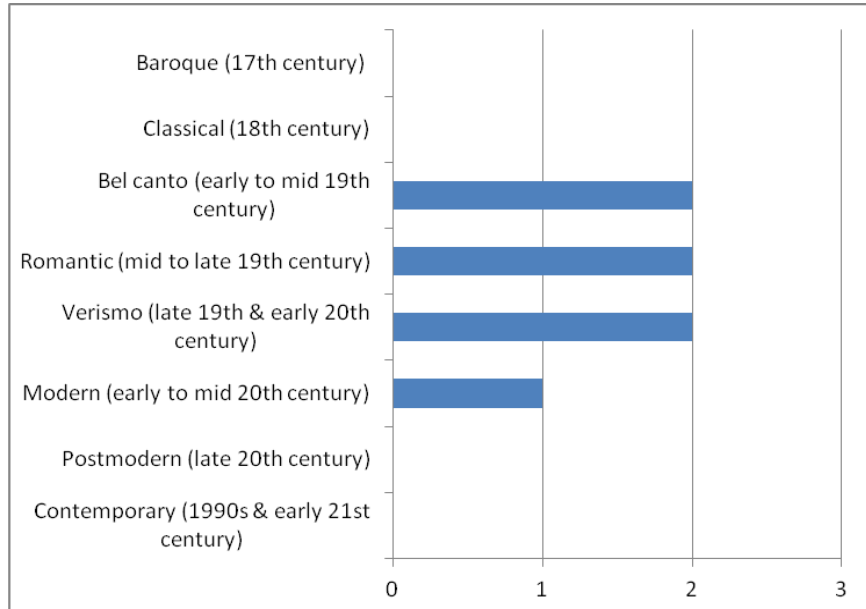
Composer breakdown for observerships



Observerships grouped by national school



Observerships grouped by style (international)



Sketching

One further aspect of methodology to consider is the capture of data through making sketches of singers as they rehearsed and performed. I discuss this further in Chapter Five: Empathy. When observing opera singers in rehearsal I began by taking notes on the movements they were making and began developing my own vocabulary to capture those features of movement that recurred and seemed to be moments of emergent operaticness. To accompany these notes I began to make sketches of the singers as they rehearsed. When sketching during stage orchestra rehearsals of *Tosca* at The Royal Opera House [See Fig. 4] I became acutely aware that I was also responding in the moment of sketch making to the drive of the music and dramatic action. Sketching thus put me in closer relation to the singer and to the experience of operaticness that I sought to identify, further reinforcing the notion of empathy experienced as an opera queen whilst channelling the kinaesthetic response into the making of the sketch. These sketches then became a tool for illustrating to dancers something of the flow of energy I was seeking to instil in their movement, while not prescribing dynamics in a foundational manner or attempting to codify or fix movement or dynamics. The making of sketches therefore formed an aspect of the methodology, a way to capture movement through a kind of movement (the action of sketching) that could then be translated into movement of the full body again through a relationship of choreographer to dancer that included the use of the sketch alongside a verbal explanation of what was illustrated.



Fig. 4: *Tosca*, orchestra stage rehearsal, Royal Opera House, July 2013. The sketch is not intended as a realistic representation but rather captures the dramatic forward thrust of the hands in combination with the backward movement of the shoulders necessary for keeping the chest and throat open for singing, and a sweeping forward of the whole body led dually by forehead and pelvis. The head bent forward, enabling the front of the neck to remain open for singing. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

Interviews

Opera scholarship has been neglectful of the experience of the singer as a means to approach the subject of opera. Through centralising the experience of the singer in my data gathering I make a contribution to the literature by utilising this means of interrogation of the subject. Mary Ann Smart (2000, p. 10) credits Koestenbaum with integrating the body of the fan into opera studies, and this is a feature I have continued through my autobiographical approach. However this is done alongside integrating the singer's experience and body, a major concern of the opera queen, who longs to inhabit the space of the singer.

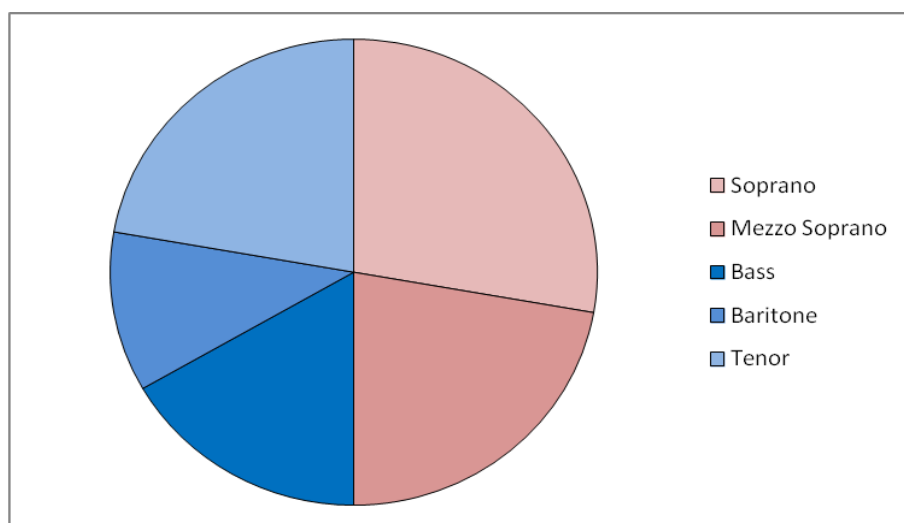
The body is not however completely absent in opera studies. Literature which focuses on gender representation in opera is regarded as an examination of the significance of the body of the singer in the thesis. This was directly pertinent to my research and the application of queer theory. Smart (2000) and André (2006) offer many useful examples of subversive gender representation in opera and the subsequent destabilising effect this has on the binary system of gender organisation. Furthermore Hutcheon & Hutcheon (1996) discuss the lesbian character, Geschwitz in Berg's *Lulu*, who is exposed as "a threat to the patriarchal order's biological model of reproductive sexuality" (1996, p. 133). This is an example of how sexuality, as well as gender, might also disturb binary stability in opera. This again relates to my queer theoretical line of enquiry. These three texts while presenting examples of how gender and sexuality affects the reading of bodies in performance do not however examine the singer's experience and opinion, which was, at the time of the research, a relatively unexplored means through which to examine opera.

Andrew Palmer (2000) interviews singers directly but concentrates only on discussions relating to the voice and to singing and does not include questions on movement and acting. Daniel Meyer-Dinkgräfe (2013) does address issues beyond singing and his questions on consciousness were made directly to singers. This approach presented a model from which I crafted my own interview schedule. Singers in the Meyer-Dinkgräfe study were asked to relate their experiences of performing to matters of spirituality and consciousness. The problem with Meyer-Dinkgräfe's conclusions on opera and consciousness are that they only hold true if the particular model of consciousness he proposes is correct and this is partly reliant on matters of faith to remain stable. This issue notwithstanding his ability to identify moments of the singer's experience that related to consciousness or spirituality and to ask them directly "Can you describe this experience?" influenced my own mode of questioning, particularly in relation to approaching the topic of embodiment, which I felt related especially to operaticness.

The interview questions⁸ were primarily concerned with the training in movement that singers had received and with how movement is negotiated in the relationship between director and performer in rehearsal and performance. These questions also led to conversations pertaining to issues of operaticness and reflections on other issues related to the performance of opera. The intention of this line of questioning was to identify if there is a form of pedagogy for operaticness and whether what I term the operatic is a feature of discussions during rehearsals and in the relationship between director and singer.

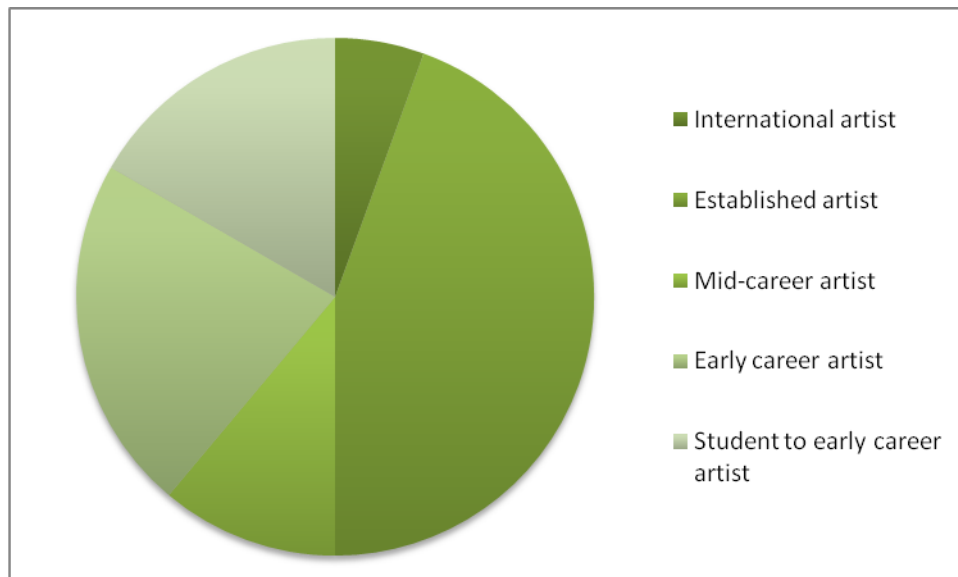
⁸ See Appendix 3: The Interview Schedule.

Interviews were conducted in person with eighteen opera singers from six opera companies including the four where I had observed rehearsals. In each case I had seen the singer in rehearsal or in performance or in most cases both. This meant that the conversation could address specifics of a singer's movement as well as the general questions. This selection of singers was intended to represent a range of voice types: soprano, mezzo-soprano, bass, baritone and tenor. Though small, the group also represented an equal split in terms of gender. In my search for the operatic I wanted to escape a gender specific notion of operaticness and the notion that an opera queen's reception of opera only occurs within the relationship of gay male fan to female opera singer as found most often in the literature relating to the opera queen, with the notable exception of Balzac's *Sarrasine*, discussed by Barthes in *S/Z* (Barthes: 1973), which concerns the adoration of a castrati.⁹ Therefore the selection of subjects was deliberately gender representative. The following pie chart (playfully employing stereotypes of gender binarism), illustrates the even split between male and female performers, (blue and pink hemispheres), and high and low voices (light and dark hemispheres).



⁹ Castrated high voiced male singer common in 17th and 18th century opera who exhibits both male and female characteristics when viewed through a binary model of gender.

The selection also represents singers at various stages of their careers from student singers to a highly regarded international performer with extensive experience. This meant that within the sample group participants had received their formal education at different times and had different levels of professional experience. This selection was made to test within the search for the operatic if the gestures and ways of moving that I was identifying and describing were occurring similarly despite dissimilarity in training and experience or not. This would indicate whether operaticness is associated with training and experience or whether it may occur through some other means.



In alphabetical order the singers interviewed¹⁰ were: Dame Josephine Barstow, Emma Bell, Matthew Best, Susan Bickley, Sylvia Clarke, Katherine Goeldner, Paul Hudson, Louise Kemeny, Elizabeth Llewellyn, Robert McPherson, Jorge Navarro-Colorado, Sarah Redgwick, Phillip Rhodes, Ross Scanlon, Faith Sherman, Simon Thorpe, Peter Wedd, and one other singer who preferred to remain anonymous.

¹⁰ These singers were accessed through approaches made to opera companies including The Royal Opera, Welsh National Opera, English Touring Opera, Opera North, British Youth Opera and Glyndebourne Festival Opera.

Workshops and projects

In order to experiment with the data I was collecting through observations, interviews and sketch making, and to test developing hypotheses, I created a series of workshops and undertook a longer term project. These components of the methodology were designed to address different but specific emergent issues relating to the overall research question but broadly addressed the issue of how as a facilitator/choreographer I could generate operaticness in the bodies of others. Four workshops were undertaken with different target groups of participants (singers, performers and non-performers) alongside an extended project with undergraduate students of dance at the University of Wolverhampton.

The first of the workshops took place in Wolverhampton on 16th April 2013 with singers from the English Touring Opera. The workshop focussed on delivering Butoh techniques to singers with a view to understanding if these were compatible with the needs of singers when performing. This line of enquiry also concerned testing whether embodiment techniques I was familiar with through my physical training in Butoh could contribute to the engendering of the operatic. Could I, through greater contact with singers in the environment of a workshop, develop specific *Butoh-fu* (or opera-fu as I would come to regard them) to capture certain movements or ways of moving I had identified as operatic? The workshop was also an opportunity to learn from singers about their physical preparations before performing, which complemented the information I was gathering through interviews with other singers. The workshop included some Butoh inspired improvisations performed to recordings of opera, exploring movement performed by singers when not singing.

The next two workshops were titled *Lohengrin Workshops* as they used music from Wagner's opera of that name. The workshop was presented twice at different conferences with delegates as participants. Firstly at the international 'Richard Wagner's Impact on His World and Ours' conference at the University of Leeds on 2nd June 2013 with participants who had specific knowledge concerning Wagner's life, music and theories. The second was at the 'Interactivity/Interpassivity Post Graduate Research Conference' on 21st June 2013 at the University of Wolverhampton which comprised participants who had little or no knowledge or preconceptions of Wagner. These workshops focussed on producing operatic movement through the use of techniques and opera-fu I had been developing from the observations I had been making of singers in rehearsal. The use of so-called 'frames' (still or moving motifs) was introduced with the idea of testing, through comparing the outcomes of the workshops, whether the movements created by participants were influenced by prior knowledge and appreciation of Wagner. This was seen as equivalent to the external knowledge that my identity as opera queen brings to my appreciation of opera.

The last workshop took place at the University of Worcester 18th November 2013 as part of a programme of events entitled 'Worcester Week' in which students at the university were exposed to the research of visiting academics as a complement to their formal studies. This workshop titled *Move Like a Diva* offered me an opportunity to impart the sensibility of the opera queen along with techniques for generating the operatic physicality.

Another aspect of the practical elements of the study was through working with Shauna Tunstall and Charlotte Morewood, students at the University of Wolverhampton, during the spring of 2013. Over a series of sessions I was able to develop choreographies with these dancers using the sketches I had made during my observerships with the opera companies. I also included training in Butoh and then extended this to training in Body Opera and the opera-fu I had developed to try to find ways to engender operaticness in their performances. In an interview conducted after the period of working together these dance students talked about their experience of being exposed to Butoh and of attempting operatic movement. This is included in discussion of this project in Chapter Three: Embodiment.

The experiments in workshops, and through this project, constituted practical elements of the research pattern that fed into the devising, rehearsing and performance of the pieces of practice discussed at the beginning of the chapter. What I learned from the experiments informed my approach to working with dancers and in choreographing myself when creating work as I will explore throughout the thesis. The pattern of the methodology, field studies, experiment in workshops and the creation of practice was not conducted sequentially but simultaneously. Practice that raised further questions to be addressed in field studies and tested in workshops led to further practice and so an inductive cycle continued up unto a point at which the research question had been addressed.

Practice One: Trio xxx

{Intermezzo}

The first example of practice is *Trio xxx*. At this point the reader is invited to refer to the accompanying DVD¹¹ in order to see documentation of a performance of the work, which may be viewed now or after reading this section. The work is discussed in relation to points already raised in the introduction and Chapter One: Methodology, and provides a starting point and context for further discussion of practice and theory in subsequent chapters and examples of practice.

In the introduction I discussed the primary influences that impact on my practice. *Trio xxx* is a clear example of the intersection of these three influences: Butoh, queer theory and opera. The movement is derived from Butoh and is often slow and is generated through the use of *Butoh-fu*. Queer theory is exemplified through the performance strategy of cross-dressing and through the presentation of same-sex eroticism, which decentres heterosexuality because, according to Butler, the binary organisation of gender is regulated by, “the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality” (2006: p. 31), which differentiates masculine and feminine, “through the practices of heterosexual desire” (2006: p. 31). Opera, the last of the three influences discussed, not only provides the music for the work, but operaticness is also explored in the movement through the embodiment of music and themes and ideas from the narrative of the opera extract heard.

¹¹ See DVD ‘Daniel Somerville: Practice’ – *Trio xxx* is on first page of the Works menu. The quality of the documentation varies and this example is one of the less good ones and so photographic representation of the work in the thesis should be considered alongside the viewing of the documentation. The quality of the documentation of subsequent works improves.

The work, as is typical in my practice, includes an element of strip, a creative acknowledgement of nightclub entertainment and cabaret. Stripping is also a very accessible semiotic device for the concrete realisation of the notion of transformation – from being covered, to being exposed. The term ‘transformation’ is central to the practice of Butoh (where transformation occurs between the quotidian body and the expressive embodiment of the *Butoh-fu*) and is also a feature of the ‘operatic moment’ (see Introduction) as will be expanded upon in Chapter Four.



Fig. 5: Daniel Somerville (with Dimitris Politis) in *Trio xxx*. The distorted forms of Butoh are combined with queer theory in the form of cross-dressing, and a sense of operaticness. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

The work is set to the final trio from *Der Rosenkavalier* (Strauss: 1991),¹² which is interspersed with interruptions by jumbled recordings of various pop divas and the work is lit by a projection from the forestage which provides an ever-shifting colour

¹² Audio reference.

pattern. This juxtaposition of contemporary and digital media, with the impression of period styling in the costume and the sounds of opera, is intended to underline the struggles and transformation which the characters undergo during their erotic exchange as they respond to the voices of the three singers. The voices penetrate the bodies of the dancers and carry them, move them, echoing the response of the opera queen to listening to opera described by Koestenbaum (1993).

The work also addresses the notion of “forgetting” referred to by Catherine Clément (1988). Clément’s *Opera: the undoing of Women* (1988) has as its central premise, that predominantly male composers have possessed and used the emotional qualities of music (the feminine) to obscure the violence inflicted on female characters in the text (the masculine).

In opera, the forgetting of words, the forgetting of women, have the same deep roots. Reading the texts, more than in listening at the mercy of an adored voice, I found to my fear and horror, words that killed, words that told every time of women’s undoing. (Clément: 1988, p. 22)

In this work I am presenting myself, cross-dressed as a female character, or at least, as an opera queen attempting to inhabit a female character. The encounter that ensues in *Trio xxx* is intended as uninhibited, raw and sensual, and by the end the character I dance, is left exposed, vulnerable and abandoned [See Fig. 6]. I am placing myself, through this work, in the position of the female characters described by Clément in order to better understand the notion that tragic narratives and unacceptable abuses in the text are masked by the beauty of the music.



Fig. 6: Daniel Somerville in *Trio xxx*. At the end of the performance the 'female' character is left partially dressed exposing blood stained underwear, she plays with an imaginary balloon before noticing the audience and running off stage. November 2012. The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

I am simultaneously engaging with themes from my lived experience and here the autobiographical quality of the work is evident – referring to failed relationships and the one-night-stand culture of urban gay life, the romantic ideal of opera juxtaposed with the thumping confusion of nightclub social life. Ultimately the sweep of the music is intended to obscure the violence of the incident represented making it perhaps seem beautiful. Even though it is no more than a casual, anonymous sexual encounter, it is mediated by the illusory nature of performance and the sweep of the music. In this regard the work explores Clément's criticism of opera while simultaneously exploring the opera queen's silent lip-synched and kinaesthetic response to the music – the lip-synching, reminiscent of the silent scream in Butoh.

It is intended as an unheard cry of a young man who longs for love but mistakes lustful desire for affection and thereafter seeks solace in opera only to find it full of deceptions.

Trio xxx is an exploration through practice of the ideas relating to the sensual aspect of operaticness. The erotic flow of energy through the body took me closer to understanding the role that fluidity plays in the engendering of the operatic. The other contribution the work made to my research was in affirming the integrated and internalised importance of opera to my identity and my lived experience. That this exploration led me to embody memories of youthful promiscuity, much of which was played out through encounters that began in opera houses, also affirms a very personal realisation about the parallel development in youth of my identity as opera lover and expressions of my sexuality and sexual orientation. Though the work provided an iconic image [See Fig. 1, p. 5] for the research, a moment of operaticness captured perfectly within the flow of movement, I also realised that opera and the operatic cannot only be concerned with, and engendered by, a sense of eroticism. The questions which *Trio xxx* raised were: what else contributes to a sense of operaticness in movement? And, where does operaticness in movement originate for opera singers?

Chapter Two: Performing Opera

{Act I}

Where might operaticness originate or how might it be acquired in the training of opera singers and be negotiated during rehearsals with a director? To answer this, the first line of enquiry, opera singers were interviewed and observed in rehearsal and I began to assess which aspects of the movements I was observing, could be regarded as operatic according to the criteria discussed in Chapter One. The interview process revealed a tendency by respondents to conflate discussions of movement with discussions of acting technique and training. This led me to include in this chapter, discussion of acting in opera. I will also begin to address another line of enquiry,¹ the application of queer theory to my exploration of opera. To close this chapter I will discuss opera in relation to postmodern performance practice and argue for a re-evaluation of the suitability of naturalistic acting in opera as a consequence.

Singers on movement

The aim of the first set of questions in the interview schedule² was to establish the role of posture in singing and its relation to movement. These questions go towards answering the first part of the overall research question regarding the physical and practical conditions that influence movement for opera singers. Answers highlighted not only the need for the maintenance of the singer's instrument, through attention to internal musculature, but also the conflict this creates between the vocal demands of a role and the stage action. This line of questioning also highlighted the emphasis

¹ In the introduction this line of enquiry is listed as the third. However I address it in two parts and begin to address it in this chapter before I have addressed the second line of enquiry in Chapter Three.

² See Appendix 3, The Interview Schedule.

placed on acting and character development in the training of singers and in their approach to developing movement in performance.

Out of eighteen respondents sixteen said that the importance of posture in their training was "very important", with one other saying that it was "important." When the question was slightly reworded to enquire as to how much *emphasis* was given to posture in training ten respondents felt the emphasis was "heavy" and seven felt that there was "some" emphasis given. This shows a slight disparity between the importance of good posture and the actual emphasis that was given to it as an aspect of training. Overall however, it was clear that posture played a large part in the training of these respondents. Good posture as described by the respondents allows for good internal muscle support (pelvic floor and diaphragm) and an avoidance of tension, which otherwise may adversely affect the vocal chords. Descriptions of good posture emphasised "alignment", "grounding", "balance", "relaxation", "comfort" and "being without tension", which could be achieved through "a long back, with head suspended", "a continuous column from pelvic floor to head" and "straight spine with shoulders relaxed."

My next set of questions concerned the maintenance of posture when moving all or part of the body. Fourteen respondents felt that good posture should be maintained while moving and singing. Two felt that good posture should be "returned to" but could be "dropped" and the other two felt that movement was dictated by character alone regardless of the vocal demands.

This highlighted the prioritising of the art of singing and the need for good vocal production over and above the requirements of stage action for the majority, but not all, of the opera performers interviewed and provided the first sign of a conflict between the needs of the music and the needs of the action for some respondents. The requirements that movement “should be natural” or “fluid” were frequent interjections in the responses to questions concerning posture when moving. When asked to describe “correct” movement for opera singers again “fluidity”, “alignment” and “grounding” were important aspects mentioned. Four respondents highlighted the influence of character in the generation of movement. Among those was Josephine Barstow, who has enjoyed a long and successful international career and at the time of the study was coaching singers. She was quite categorical in emphasising that “we are actors” (2013). Another singer, who requested anonymity, said, “Movement shouldn’t prevent you from singing”, alluding to the anxiety many singers implied when approaching the subject of the vocal demands measured against the demands of action. Good posture in movement can be achieved through “walking on the balls of your feet”, “a long back”, “keeping a good relation between head and body” and interestingly “maintaining the torso through tail to back of head” [See Fig. 7] which, combined with comments on “suspension” as an aspect of good posture is reminiscent of the ‘suspended body’ in Butoh training. The emphasis on alignment may also be explained through exposure to Alexander Technique,³ which although no reference was made directly to it, may have formed an aspect in their training and practice.

³ A technique developed by actor, F M Alexander to promote bodily alignment and relaxation, a way to prevent tension through mindfulness of inefficient habits of posture and movement. It is particularly popular among singers and practitioners of Alexander Technique were observed to frequently advertise their services in the artist’s entrances of theatres and opera houses visited during the research.



Fig. 7: *Tosca*, orchestra stage rehearsal, Royal Opera House, July 2013. This sketch represents a moment during rehearsals where the singer staggers forward on the balls of her feet, straight back, limbs and head suspended. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

Sixteen respondents said that there had been “some” or “heavy” emphasis given to movement in their training, while the remaining two felt there had been “little” or “very little” movement training, but they had received actor training “with some Stanislavski exercises.”⁴ This demonstrated that among this group the majority had received some kind of movement training and most felt it had been an important aspect of their training. On further enquiry many of those referring to movement training had in fact conflated the idea of movement training with actor training and had not received discrete training in movement.

On enquiring whether respondents felt that training in movement should be taught separately to vocal training five respondents felt it should, eight felt that it should not be taught separately, while four felt that they should be taught separately in the initial stages of training and then together later on. Interestingly fifteen respondents had received their training in singing and movement separately and one had received their training in movement and singing simultaneously. What these results indicate is that while most had received their vocal and movement training separately, less than a third felt that this was the best way to be trained. Those who tended to prefer separate training fell into the category of student or early and mid-career artists. The responses of singers with more experience of performing in opera implied that, with hindsight, a more integrated approach to singing and movement in training would have better prepared them for the demands of the stage.

⁴ Actor training exercises aimed at generating ‘naturalistic’ character and emotion. The significance of Stanislavski and naturalism as analogous with ‘actor training’ will be discussed further (see p. 89).

What became clear in answering the research question regarding the physical and practical conditions that affect operatic movement is that, on the whole, the body of the singer is held in such a way as to preserve their instrument from pelvic floor to larynx, even while they are moving. This explained observations I had made where I had identified, for example, that singers were bending forward at the top of the leg using the hip joint, rather than at the stomach or sternum (bending the mid spine), which would affect the support of breath by the diaphragm. Singers also went to great efforts to be grounded; feet apart, at an angle, often one in front of the other. Singers were often observed taking opportunities to stop mid movement, or while walking, if the vocal demands required the stability of grounding. It also meant that large movements that could affect stability, and which may therefore cause tension and adversely affect the voice, were placed so as not to coincide with demanding vocal passages. This meant that these stops or large gestures were placed according to the needs of the vocal instrument rather than with attention to dramatic impulse. Similarly, changes in direction of attention while standing still were achieved via the shifting of weight across the horizontal plane of the pelvis with legs slightly bent, to prevent bending or twisting of the body.

Without expressiveness in the shape of the torso, the shaping of the arms became a major focus in achieving expression and in indicating emotion. Close attention to the relation of the palm of the hand to the face was often observed, this reduced the need to bend the neck, but the head was nonetheless mobile – floating, suspended in such a way as to keep the neck free of tension [See Fig. 8 & Fig. 9].



Fig. 8: *Anna Bolena*, stage piano rehearsal, Wales Millennium Centre, August 2013. The palms of the hands have been drawn apart, starting close to the face. In this position the eyes are turned towards the descending (stage right) hand, while the other hand ascends asymmetrically increasing the impression that the head is turn downwards, while in fact the neck remains elongated. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

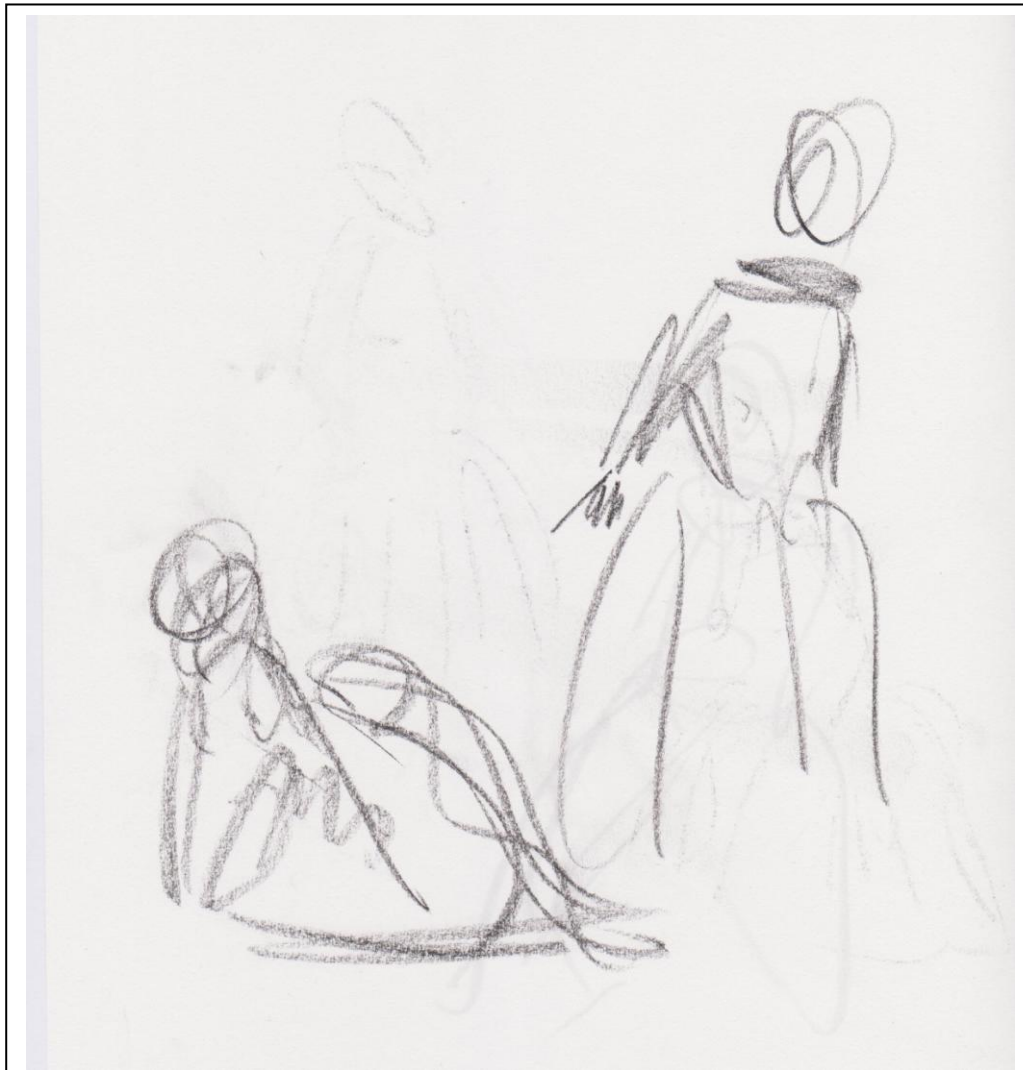


Fig. 9: *Anna Bolena*, stage piano rehearsal, Wales Millennium Centre, August 2013. In this example the stage right hand of the standing figure has journeyed from the palm facing under the singer's chin to this position, pointing at the kneeling figure, while her torso has been turned away (towards stage left) using the horizontal plane of the pelvis. At the completion of the movement, the singer bends slightly at the hip. The use of the hand in this way gives the impression of a much larger movement of the body than has actually been executed. The kneeling figure, in supporting herself with the upstage (stage right) arm maintains a straight spine and opens the chest and face towards the audience by drawing the other arm back towards the standing figure. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

These characteristics of movement were not related to character development or to naturalistic acting techniques but were strategies for singers to attain expressive movement while still meeting the physical demands of singing. In this regard they met the criteria for operatic movement that I had established. In terms of achieving a sense of operatic movement in the body of a non-singer, these specific corporeal

demands should, I concluded, be understood through the body and I explored them in the choreography I developed for *French Collection* which I will discuss in Practice Two: French Collection, at the end of this chapter.

Operatic gesture

The next set of questions concerned gesture and this was the issue which began to focus the discussion on conceptions of the operatic. Operaticness in the minds of opera singers appeared to have a close connection to notions of gesture, although one singer felt that there was “no such thing” as “appropriate gesture for an opera singer.” Five others felt that gesture was determined by “character”, “text”, “story”, or “the director”, and a further five felt that gesture should always be “natural.”

This foregrounding of naturalistic acting and attention to plot, text and director-led attitudes to generating gesture may be explained by the prevalence of theatre directors working in opera. Matthew Best explained, that there are “a lot of directors coming from theatre and they have different expectations. There is a difference between ‘straight theatre’ and opera – there is an increasing emphasis these days on naturalism” (2013). Catherine Goeldner agreed: “The more straight theatre directors that come into opera, the less, I mean they’re trying to get rid of it [the operatic], which personally I think is a mistake because it’s a big art, it’s a big stage and our movements are informed by the music” (2013). Best compared the situation to forty or fifty years ago, where one might encounter singers performing with “broad movements of the arms” (2013). Goeldner also referred to broad movements, clarifying: “It’s when it’s disconnected, when it’s thoughtless, you run

into the criticism of you being operatic. Personally I think big gestures done deliberately and with the correct thought behind them are not a problem" (2013). Best described how increasingly singers are asked to avoid grand gestures however and pointed out that: "Operatic is not a complimentary term. It is regarded as old fashioned" (2013). Simon Thorpe also spoke of the "negative stereotype of an opera singer ... [doing] large almost over-the-top welcoming type gestures" (2013). Goeldner summed up a feeling that I frequently encountered when talking to singers informally as well as in interviews: "I think if you don't want that [operatic] then don't work in that art. If you [directors] want theatre acting, then work in theatre; if you want to do opera then please do opera because you are someone who loves opera and you are there because you really want to be" (2013).

Twelve of the singers interviewed felt the emphasis given to gesture in training was "heavy" or "some" while three thought the emphasis was "little" or "very little", while two others felt there was "no" emphasis given to gesture in their training. This demonstrates a level of inconsistency across the group in terms of training concerning gesture, with a relatively even spread from those who had, to those who had not received training in gesture. When asked if gesture should be taught separately to vocal training the group was split. Half argued that gesture should be "minimal" when training vocally, while half argued for a "holistic" approach that would "embed" gesture in the process of singing. Half the group had received training in gesture but this was largely in relation to actor training and again direct mention was made of "Stanislavski exercises" by two respondents.

Singers spoke about gesture using phrases such as “make it real”, “the body has in-built expressiveness” and how gesture is “a psycho-physical reaction ... a mental idea leads to gesture” all pertaining to naturalism in acting. The majority of interjections concerned the reduction of gesture: “do as little as possible”, “less is more” and “clean it up” were comments offered. Phillip Rhodes (2013) and Sarah Redgwick (2013) both referred to their training in gesture as being a process of correcting it when it was wrong. Rather than being offered training in what to do, singers it seems were sometimes only instructed in what not to do and the general feeling from the comments I encountered was that what should not be done were gestures and ways of moving that did not relate to plot or character. These types of gestures would fit my criteria for the operatic and so what I was encountering was conceivably an excising of operaticness in opera through the characterising of all operatic gesture as “over-the-top”, “grandiose” and “melodramatic”. All of these types of gestures were, it seems, discouraged whether or not there was, as Goeldner (2013) had put it, “correct thought behind them” and many were examples of singers negotiating the need for vocal production alongside action.

To explore this further I asked questions regarding the negotiation of movement and gesture in the relationship between singer and director in rehearsal. Half the group had encountered a director correcting a movement or gesture on the basis that it was “too operatic”. Members of that half of the group had also encountered being “directed to move in ways that were contrary to good vocal production” and all but two of the other half had experienced the same. Overall, sixteen had been directed to move in ways contrary to good vocal production and six had been discouraged

from moving in ways that would “otherwise be regarded as good practice.” The balancing of vocal production against action required by directors was regarded by respondents as an area where negotiation – “trying things out” – most often resolved conflicts, and acknowledgement was made of the wide variety of directorial approaches ranging from the completely collaborative director to “dictatorial” auteur.

One final question related to the issue of how operaticness is acquired when I asked singers directly if they had ever had any training in what might be termed “artistry” specific to opera performance. Three related aspects of their movement training or a one week workshop that one had attended, to the concept of specific opera artistry training, but none felt that they had been trained in how to be an opera performer in a way that related only to opera performance and not also to other performing arts such as dance or theatre.

Several deductions can be made from the information gathered through these interviews combined with the observing of rehearsals with directors. The first is that singers are not trained in what I had identified as operaticness. The second is that within directorial approaches to opera there are many different styles and approaches but there is a discernible trend towards naturalistic acting and directors from theatre treating opera as primarily drama. The third is that there is often a conflict between the needs of naturalistic action (requiring a free and responsive body) and the requirements of good posture for singing operatically. Lastly that operaticness is regarded negatively and is frequently discouraged in training and by directors.

Literature on acting in opera

The programme of research was concerned with how the operatic manifested during the research period. Treatises on dramatic gesture and movement that may have applied to historical contexts, such as contained in John Bulwar's *Chirologia* (1644) are not therefore considered in detail. Though three of the singers interviewed had received training in Baroque gesture of the type codified by Bulwar and his contemporaries, this training was only utilised by them in productions requiring period authenticity. At the close of the chapter, and subsequently, I will however, consider George Shea's *Acting in Opera* (1915) which represents a more recent attempt to codify operatic gesture in response to encroaching attitudes from theatre and the influence of naturalism. Similarly I will make mention of Wagner's comments on "gestures of quite special peculiarity ... elevated and enobled above ordinary life – and to a pitch bordering on the marvellous" (Wagner: 1913, p. 574) that form the basis of what may be considered the Bayreuth style captured by Anna Bahr-Mildenburg in 1936 (Baragwanath: 2007). Shea's work and that of Wagner, especially as mediated through Bahr-Mildenberg, concern the type of stylisation and artificiality that I have identified as contributing to the operatic and therefore can be viewed as representing the kind of gesture and movement that contemporary exponents of naturalism in opera performance seem to want to suppress. As part of my exploration therefore, observation of gesture and movement that appears to be a residue or remnant of these more recent codifications became very interesting as it indicates that certain gestures and ways of moving have nonetheless survived and been passed down despite the absence of a formal pedagogy that includes them. This I will explore further in Chapter Five: Empathy.

The tendency towards naturalism in acting in opera is evidenced by surveying contemporary guides to acting for opera singers. Mark Ross Clark (2002) offers this introduction to posture:

There is a common misconception that when a singer stands on stage, he or she should “hold” the shoulders and chest high in an unnatural performing stance. This posture produces an unnatural performance. When someone stands, walks, and sits one way in daily life and another way onstage, it rings false to those in the audience and to the performer. (Clark: 2002, p. 11)

The emphasis is clearly on producing a natural appearance for the acting singer. Similarly, Leon Major (2011) presents “some ideas and an array of examples to show how singers can use actors’ tools to enrich their performances, to bring more believable and powerful performances to audiences” (p. xvi). His intention as a director is for “theatrical realisation” (p. xvii), demonstrating an emphasis on the dramatic aspect of opera performance, rather than a more rounded view that incorporates the influence of the music and the possibility of acting that does not generate believability through naturalism. LizBeth Abeyta Lucca (2007) acknowledges the “inside out versus outside in” techniques for actors. However, throughout her book as demonstrated through the chapter titles, she recommends Method acting techniques such as understanding “primary want”, working with “the fourth wall” and developing “back stories” (Lucca: 2007). The approaches to acting in opera found in these texts presuppose a necessity for naturalism and believability.

The Stanislavski paradox

Searching for an operative, that is a non-normative position, requires firstly a concept of the normative in terms of performance against which it may be measured. Because naturalism, as a style, has become normalised in Western culture as analogous with acting, and because opera singers are required to act as part of their craft, contemporary actor training for opera singers engages primarily with theatre acting techniques derived from the school of naturalism. With this in mind, I am positioning naturalistic acting as normative and centralised.

The framing of acting *as* naturalism, I refer to as the Stanislavski paradox. I will use secondary sources to illustrate how Stanislavski has become positioned as the father of naturalism, though his writings may not always reflect this in relation to opera. According to Allain & Harvie (2006) Stanislavski is recognised as “the central proponent in the... movement of naturalism in theatre” (2006, p. 69), a movement that “has shown extraordinary resilience, popularity and longevity and still remains the dominant theatre form in the Western world today” (2006, p.179). One account of the dominance and centralisation of naturalism in acting is that Stanislavski’s techniques as explained in *An Actor Prepares* (1936) became distilled into American Method Acting by Lee Strasberg who “claimed to have invented a Stanislavskian acting Method that emphasised emotional memory and self-analysis... [and] the importance of the actor’s personal connection to a role” (Bloom: 2001, p. 44).

Method Acting and the naturalism that it aimed to produce in the actor were especially suited to acting in film. The prevalence of cinema, and in particular the

influence of Hollywood, established naturalism as the dominant and in many respects normalised style of acting in the mid twentieth century and into the early twenty first century. Jerzy Grotowski points out: "Throughout his numerous years of research his [Stanislavski's] method evolved, but his disciples did not. Stanislavski had disciples for each of his periods and each disciple stuck to his particular period" (Bial: 2004, p. 190). Stella Adler, who had worked with Stanislavski, objected to Strasberg's interpretation of "Method, and with it much of American acting, [maintaining it had a] narrow focus, largely ignoring... *Building a Character* and *Creating a Role* [later books in which] Stanislavski balanced the physical and emotional, promoting a way for actors to work from the inside out *and* from the outside in" (Bloom: 2001, p. 44). The important distinction that Bloom makes between 'inside out' and 'outside in' relates to the shift in emphasis in Stanislavski's career from "psycho-physical actions, a response through the sensory body to imagining someone in a given situation" (Callery: 2001, p. 149) and his student, Meyerhold's "physiological route [where] emotional expression was a by-product of intensely detailed physical choreography" (Callery: 2001, p. 149), which Stanislavski would gravitate towards later in his career. Grotowski and other practitioners with a focus on physical approaches to theatre making and performance, such as Eugenio Barba, confirm the significance of this shift in Stanislavski's later years (Allain & Harvie: 2006, p. 69).

The shift is not only between psychological and physiological production of action for the actor, it also illustrates an important split between text based approaches to theatre and avant-garde approaches that include devised theatre, physical theatre

and collaborative processes. "Stanislavski attempted to construct a system based on acting techniques for texts" (Callery: 2001, p. 13) whereas avant-garde groups such as The Living Theatre, as Arnold Aronson (2000) points out, were a "reaction against naturalism, against the American version of Stanislavski" (2000, p. 48). Avant-garde theatre described by Aronson with its intersection with performance art and dance theatre is viewed in this thesis as belonging to a broader movement of late twentieth century performance practice that includes the visual theatre of Robert Wilson, the expressive movement of Butoh and collage theatre of The Wooster Group. Despite the existence of alternative styles and approaches to acting and performance making, naturalism still largely eclipses them in cinema and mainstream theatre.

The Stanislavski paradox is that if the style of naturalism as initiated by Stanislavski has become a commonly found approach to acting in opera, that approach contradicts Stanislavski's own comments on acting in opera (1975). Singers appear to encounter Stanislavski more often in relation to his writings on theatre acting than they do to his writings on opera. His allusion to embodiment as a tool for the opera performer appears to be in conflict with any need for an internal psychological motivation for the acting singer and acknowledges the primacy of the music as the genesis of action. An external influence rather than an internal motivation drives the performance of the opera singer for Stanislavski. This captures my own experience of working with (recorded) opera music in developing choreographic material, where music can be the impetus from which to create action through improvisation, and thereafter, generate meaning, narrative and emotion.

I have thus far been discussing the centralisation of naturalistic approaches to acting as the dominant style of acting for opera. This is evidenced by the experiences of singers who were interviewed and through observations of opera rehearsals. Whether the design of the production was naturalistic or not, they nonetheless employed largely naturalistic approaches to acting and rehearsals were dominated by discussions of character motivation justified through textual analysis. That is not to say however that all opera productions use naturalist acting, in fact many directors employ a range of avant-garde approaches to performance and so-called 'postmodern' productions of operas or 'concept' opera productions (terms widely employed to describe any non-traditional stylisation, which may or may not actually be derived from postmodern theory or performance practice) are commonplace. These productions, singers told me, present a particular challenge to those who have only been trained in naturalistic acting and movement. I am therefore describing two trends: opera productions (whether traditional or concept) that insist on naturalistic acting, such as those encountered during the research, and more stylised productions (none of which were observed in rehearsal during the research but were referred to by interviewees) which require extreme or stylised physicality. Both types of production presenting challenges to singers, in that, the movement they are required to perform may conflict with the corporeal needs of good vocal production. That is not to say however that singers find these challenges insurmountable.

I am not arguing the case for traditional versus concept opera productions (as both have a place) but for the development of a kind of movement specific to opera

performance that not just respects the physical needs of the singer in terms of vocal production but is in fact derived from those needs. Body Opera, though I began by regarding it as a way of moving for non-singers (including myself), is potentially, a tool in the training of opera singers and a style of movement that could suit the needs of singers in performance.

Defining opera

Opera clearly differs from so-called straight theatre in many ways but crucially through the fact that the characters sing rather than speak. As singing is governed by the articulation of the music and breath is placed in order to achieve what needs to be sung (and when it needs to be sung), the opera performer is closely integrated into the timing of the music. Though it can be argued that singing is a 'natural' form of communication⁵ these two characteristics of opera performance lead me to question the viability of naturalism as an approach to acting in opera. The art form, even in its most traditional productions or as manifested in plots that are regarded as psychodramas, still requires the characters to interact through singing rather than speaking – a mode of communication, not associated with ideas of everyday life. Here, even the notion of suspension of disbelief seems to me to be a far greater stretch than the term was intended to accommodate.

The argument against naturalism in opera is more complex than the issue of sung text and the intervention of musical time. In defining opera I will begin to address

⁵ In a conversation that took place prior to the research period Professor Paul Barker of Royal Central School of Speech and Drama argued that from an evolutionary perspective humans are likely to have sung sounds before they formed those sounds into words and that babies develop the ability to pick up tunes before they learn to articulate their thoughts in words. Singing from this perspective is a 'natural' and primitive form of communication.

the line of enquiry that applies aspects of gender and queer theory to this examination of opera, in order to reveal a reading of opera as non-normative. In asking what opera is, I will present an argument that opera bears closer relation to postmodern performance practice than it does to naturalistic theatre. If so, then the validity of naturalism as the dominant aspect of opera actor and movement training becomes questionable, exposing an important gap in the training of opera performers that Body Opera could potentially address. This argument also creates a defense for the operatic in opera.

Defining opera is not a straightforward task. The frustrations surrounding attempts at a definition of opera are captured by Abel:

Opera entices us and maddens us by its refusal to stand still for our contemplation. Like the photon, the unit of light in quantum physics that is sometimes wave and sometimes a particle, as soon as you think you know what opera is, it becomes something else. This postmodern elusiveness stands at the core of opera's endless fascination and fuels its powerful ambiguous eroticism. (Abel: 1996, p. 183)

The nature of photons is determined by the manner in which they are examined. In selecting a lens with which to examine opera, advances in gender theory and queer theory, which seek to escape binary notions of gender, are analogously applied to the art form which has frequently been analysed only in binary terms. This approach therefore offers a new perspective on opera as a subject. Judith Butler asserts that there is no category of 'woman' as the subject of feminism because "[i]f one 'is' a woman, that is surely not all one is... because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts" (2006: p. 4). Opera can equally be subjected to this provocation. The difficulty faced when trying to define opera is that arguably there is no discrete category of 'opera'.

As a form it is not coherently and consistently constituted and yet, there exists a contingent acknowledgement of the category of 'woman' and also a contingent understanding of the category of 'opera.'

Histories of opera commonly designate the efforts of Renaissance intellectuals of the Florentine Camerata at the end of the 1500s as the beginning of what is now widely recognised as opera. Caroline Abbate and Roger Parker remind us however that theatre that included music had a longer history in Western Europe and that the term 'opera' was applied retrospectively to the works of the Florentine composers who had a range of other terms for their compositions (2012). The Renaissance agenda however indicates that the experiments of the Camerata were a deliberate attempt to revive Greek tragedy as a form of drama with poetry set to music, though there was little evidence for what such an ancient drama with music might sound like (Abbate & Parker: 2012, p. 43). Two elements, manifesting as the libretto (text) and score (music), form the basis of the art form, but it should also be considered that operas were always intended to be staged. To arrive at a definition, it is therefore, a performance art form that combines music and drama in a spectacle or event.

This definition of opera, however, may equally describe what we know as 'the Musical'. An argument that seeks to separate opera from Musicals, for example, by defining opera as 'sung through' is problematic. Many operas, including Bizet's *Carmen* (Bizet: 1989)⁶ written in 1875, contain dialogue, while the musical

⁶ Audio reference

Les Misérables (Schönberg, 1985)⁷ is sung through. Singing style, which may be identified as another defining characteristic, varies enormously in opera from early Baroque through to *Zeitoper*. Problematising a definition, Stephen Sondheim is quoted by Norman Lebrecht as saying: "I believe an opera is something that is shown in an opera house in front of an opera audience. The same work in the West End ... is a West End show" (Sondheim: 2004). Snowman navigates the problem by suggesting that:

Perhaps it is safer not to attempt too rigid (or too loose) a definition; opera, like the proverbial elephant, is something most of us recognize when we come across it but would be hard-pressed to describe precisely to someone who had not. (Snowman: 2009, p. 8)

The opera house is revealed to be the agent for deciding what constitutes an opera, while Snowman's observation is indicative of a process of construction leading to a contingent concept of opera. If the opera house constructs our perception of opera then we must also consider how the opera house represents and reflects society.

We should first recall the semiotics of space in the standard public theatres of eighteenth-century Italy, where a monarchical loge often formed the focal point for various rows of boxes, each looped around it in a semicircle... [In the] lower tiers of the [Teatro] San Carlos [of Naples, for example], boxes were typically owned by a noble family, with family constellations reproducing the patriarchal order articulated by the grand loge of the monarch. This same pattern repeated itself at various levels of social order, from sovereign to nobles and on down, each box corresponding to that of the monarch and forming yet another microcosm of his family... [T]he principal unit of theatrical viewing was the family; and the principal figure of power and authority within the family unit was of course the husband. (Feldman: 2000, p.30)

This description of social structure as manifested in architecture, reflects Foucault's micro/macro relation of king to father in his formulation of social organisation of heteronormativity (1976, p. 100). Opera appears to be elitist and attached to the

⁷ Audio reference

patriarchy of social organisation when presented in a social context that demands it should be so. In the same way gender appears natural in a context that requires it to appear so in order to maintain the binary patriarchy. This external social context is reflected in the horseshoe shaped architecture of the eighteenth century Italian opera house auditorium (an influential model for subsequent opera houses) as Feldman (2000) describes, designed to show off the audience and their position in society as much as the operas they were watching.

If the opera house is the defining characteristic of opera⁸ there must also be a process through which such an agent identifies the works to be shown. To incorporate all the variations of how an opera may manifest within the category of opera we may consider that opera, like gender according to Butler, first appears through a process of performative utterance, which in relation to gender Butler terms "girling" (2011, p. xvii). "It's a girl" and "it's an opera" are both performative utterances that participate in the discursive construction of their respective categories. This position does not however mean that anything that calls itself an opera is an opera. Nor does it mean that works such as those of Wagner, termed 'music dramas', are not operas. Consideration of the temporal nature of performative construction should be taken into account. Gender is constructed through the reiteration of performative acts over time, but without beginning or end, a process Butler refers to as 'sedimentation'. "[C]onstruction is neither a single act nor a causal

⁸ The role of the opera house is discussed in relation to a sedimentary process of construction over time, which once completed does not however require opera productions to be performed in opera houses. I do not wish to imply that an opera can only be opera if it is performed in an opera house. The research includes an example of this, the Birmingham Opera Company production of Stockhausen's *Mittwoch aus Licht* took place in a disused warehouse. In this production there were nonetheless moments where operatic movement occurred in the bodies of singers.

process... construction not only takes place *in* time, but is itself a temporal process... a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice" (2011, p. xix). Through a constitutive sedimentation process at work in the formulation of the category of opera, even in cases where operas were named (uttered) as '*Dramma per musica*' (as was the case for some early works of the Camerata) or 'Music Drama', and not opera, they are, nonetheless, regarded as operas because they conform to the sedimented hegemonic notion of an opera and are therefore performed in opera houses.

As Rosselli (1994) states opera, in this social paradigm, "has been addressed to important people ... Through most of its history opera has been an affair of the ruling classes, however defined, with a fringe of less eminent hearers getting in besides" (p. 451). However, during the height of the popularity of opera in the nineteenth century McClary reminds us:

The operas ... were virtually all designed for a middle-class public. Yet the ornate temples within which these operas are produced and the lavish apparel deemed appropriate for opera attendance reveal a deep-seated desire on the part of the bourgeoisie to emulate the nobility, to traipse about in pseudo-aristocratic drag... [A] large part of opera's appeal is to this elitist urge. (McClary: 1988, p. xi-xii)

Therefore the sedimentation process of constituting the category of opera is inextricably tied to its positioning as elitist, conservative and pro-establishment. It is the "less eminent hearers" that become most interesting for me in this conception of opera, as I consider myself among them, and that position enables an alternative view of opera that includes an appreciation of opera as subversive, especially through directing its subversions at the heart of the establishment.

Opera and postmodern performance

Definitions of opera are complicated by contemporary and postmodern performances that declare themselves as operas: the early works of Robert Wilson, Ron Athey's *Four Scenes in a Harsh Life* (1993) and Thomas and Lee's Musical, *Jerry Springer: the opera* (2005) for example. These works do not form part of the canon of works performed by opera companies in opera houses. However, I would argue that postmodern performance and opera might in terms of both theory and practice, be brought more closely together.

Sutcliffe (1996) presents a compelling argument that opera is always and already postmodern. "If postmodernism implies the association of disparate decorative details, none of structural significance, opera could be said to be an essentially postmodern art form" (1996, p. 9). He refers here to characteristics that best define postmodern architecture (Adamson & Pavitt: 2011) but his descriptions of operatic performance as "collage", his comparisons with cinematic techniques and his discussion of Derrida's methods of deconstruction offer further comparisons with postmodern performance strategies and theoretical standpoints. Abel agrees:

Opera, the most stolid and traditional of the performing arts, the genre that clings to its past most desperately, becomes ... postmodern because of its efforts to stay resolutely pre-modern in the face of encroaching modernism. (Abel: 1996, p. 182)

Opera shares some other important characteristics with postmodern performance practice. The manipulation of the voice for example as a tool for dissociating and disrupting the sign and signified in language or reducing language to sound without meaning, as was explored by Robert Wilson and Laurie Anderson. The manipulation

of time inherent in opera arias and moments where action is suspended to reveal the inner thoughts of the characters bears a similarity to explorations of temporality by many postmodern performance practitioners including The Wooster Group and Forced Entertainment. Cross-dressing and gender play, which Abel refers to as “opera’s postmodern refusal of binary categories” (1996, p. 186), fragmentation and collage, are all strategies employed by both postmodern practitioners and authors of opera. Intertextuality, such as the musical references to Strauss’ 1905 *Salome* (Strauss, 1994)⁹ found in *La rondine* (Puccini, 1916) or in Wagner’s 1867 *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* (Wagner, 1997) to Rossini’s 1813 *Tancredi* (Rossini, 1985), as well as to his own *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner, 1865), is also a strategy associated with postmodern performance practice. Opera, like so much postmodern art, is also often self referential, it contains works that have at their centre, music impresarios, such as Mozart’s 1786 *Der Schauspieldirektor* (Mozart, 1997); there is a composer in Strauss’ 1916 *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Strauss, 1988) and singers are the protagonists in Janáček’s 1925, *Věc Makropulos* (Janáček, 1991) as well as in *Tosca* (Puccini, 1899). Abbate and Parker (2012, p. 2) reveal in their discussion of Salieri’s *Prima la musica, dopo le parole* of 1786 that this opera has as its subject the binary conflict between words and music.

Puccini presents a particularly compelling example of modern practice that might tentatively be compared to postmodernism. Intertextuality, self reference, parody, artifice, motifs borrowed from other cultures, a focus on the surface – on sentimentality over dramatic integrity, the presentation of the everyday,

⁹ Some of these references represent my encounter with the work through recordings on CD (that still leads to the conclusion discussed) and are thus referenced accordingly and appear in the ‘audio references’ section of the Bibliography.

the breaking of musical and dramatic structures, all these postmodern strategies feature in Puccini's operas. Puccini was nonetheless, working in a period of cultural production regarded as Modernism. Lyotard however, states: "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and that state is constant" (1984, p. 79). Puccini's modernism might therefore at least be said to anticipate some ideas and strategies found in postmodernism.

Lyotard also referred to the "incredulity towards metanarratives" (1984, p.xxiv) that characterise the postmodern condition. Through resistance to the metanarrative of binary gender and through the presentation of multifarious "*petit recits*" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 60) of individual identity construction, queer theory emerges as a postmodern tool of critique. It is through resisting the monolithic metanarrative of the binary system and through accepting multiple possible truths (and genders and sexualities) that queer theory's heritage in postmodernity is evident. Opera contains multiple examples of non-heteronormative representations of gender and as an art form, the boundaries of which are ever adapting, resists the monolithic metanarratives of the society in which it occurs, in particular those concerning binary conceptions of gender. Opera is also an arena in which eroticism and homo-social, if not actually homosexual, affection is frequently expressed, as exemplified by the brotherhood of knights in *Parsifal* (1882) or the close bond of friendship expressed in *The Pearl Fishers* (1863) among many examples. Through looking at opera as sharing characteristics with postmodern performance practice the incompatibility with normalised naturalistic acting becomes evident. The extraordinary stylisation

and artificiality of opera (through its use of singing as a medium of communication and through its theorisation as a postmodern performance practice) make alternative theatre performance practices relevant to opera performance and to the development of character within opera.

In summary, my position on opera is that despite first appearances, which have been brought about through a process of normalisation and binary discourse within a patriarchal society, opera shares similarities with postmodern performance practice and theory and is a resistive and therefore potentially subversive art form. Regarded thusly I propose that normative, naturalistic ways of moving taken directly from 'straight' theatre are often incompatible to the performance of opera. Furthermore, so-called 'concept' productions where there is also an attempt to stylise the body of the singer, may also present physical challenges contrary to good vocal production. In both cases, it seems, it is operaticness that is potentially excised and which should be restored. Attention to the operatic may be a way of deriving movement from the body of the singer (in response to the action of singing) rather than imposing movement that is physically and conceptually incompatible and which may therefore impede the act of singing.

Practice Two: French Collection

{*Entr'acte*}

The second example of practice is *French Collection* and the reader is now invited to view documentation of the performance on the accompanying DVD¹⁰ either now or after reading this section.



Fig. 10: Daniel Somerville in *French Collection*. Similar to earlier examples found in Chapter Two, of the relation of palm to face, here the performer moves towards the forward hand and away from the rear hand as the palms open out. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

The title of the work refers to my collection of recordings of opera on CD and how they are divided by operatic school and style. In this case, I selected music to perform to from the French school of the nineteenth century. The categorisation and collection of opera recordings is highlighted by Koestenbaum (1993) as a defining feature of the opera queen and so in allocating the title I continue to

¹⁰ See DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Practice' – *French Collection* is on first page of the Works menu.

acknowledge the role of my identity as opera queen. French opera interested me as an area to explore because of its interest in ideals of beauty and form and through the prevalence of both seduction and religion as major thematic interests. The encounter between Manon and De Grieux at the St. Sulpice in Massenet's *Manon* of 1882, (Massenet, 2000)¹¹ which I use in the third section of *French Collection*, acts as an analogy for debates on same-sex marriage that were polarising discussion between religious and human rights at the time of making of the work.

The important aspects of *French Collection* that relate to issues raised in Chapter Two: Performing Opera, are the adoption of the corporeal restraints of the opera singer's body (maintaining the integrity of the instrument from larynx to pelvic floor) in the choreography, and the primacy of music as the generator of movement through a process of listening and embodying as described by Stanislavski (1975) in relation to opera (see Introduction to this thesis). The specific use of hands in relation to face discussed in Chapter Three, is shown [See Fig. 10] as the face and body turn away from one hand, which is indicating to someone or, in this case, something (the crucifix) behind the character, or conceivably, in the past. The face and body are correspondingly moving towards the forward hand, which may be viewed as facing a possible future or an object of desire. In this example the character may be regarded as turning from faith towards passion, (a theme derived directly from the narrative of the opera scene heard) the tilting of the head and the fingers of the forehand backwards, perhaps indicating a fleeting moment of regret or hesitation as they are seemingly pulled backwards.

¹¹ Audio reference to the music heard in the documentation.



Fig. 11: Daniel Somerville and Paul Vigg in *French Collection*. These positions are derived directly from illustrations in Shea's *Acting in Opera* (1915, p. 45) denoting 'fear in flight'. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

I began the piece by exploring an attempt by George Shea (1915) to codify operatic gesture. Using illustrations from his book *Acting in Opera*, I developed choreography for the first section of *French Collection* [See Fig. 11] set to the introduction from Saint-Saëns' 1877 *Samson et Dalila* (Saint-Saëns: 1990).¹² Two men advance out of the fog gesturing in unison. One departs, the other is left alone to dance section two, set to Valentine's aria from Gounod's 1859 *Faust* (Gounod: 1991) before he is drawn off stage by the image of the crucifix. Section two includes the precise re-enactment by the dancer of Shea's description of how a singer should get up from a prostrate position (1915, p. 53). The third section set to the St. Sulpice scene from *Manon* begins with the first dancer re-entering but cross-dressed as Manon. The other character returns as De Grieux and Manon proceeds to seduce him.

¹² Audio references to music heard in the documentation.

Part of this scene also employs Shea's rules for entering – upstage foot first – and his comments on the execution of "forearm gestures" (1915, p. 33) which can lead the movement of the arm, wrists limp, upper arm following. This instruction creates an interesting detachment of the forearm, which results in expressive material. I developed it within the choreography (further than Shea would probably have found acceptable) applying notions of suspended body work from Butoh. I was mindful of Hijikata's 'Three Bellmers' from *Summer Storm* (1973) based on the fragmented body found in the work of Hans Bellmer. The three influences on my practice are again evident. Elements of Butoh (including white painted Butoh face, slowed movement and use of embodiment techniques and reference to the Three Bellmers) combined with queer strategies (cross-dressing and same-sex affection), and strategies for engendering operatic movement, combine in this work.

As I progressed through the research and in particular the observing of opera singers in rehearsal I observed several instances where residues of Shea's codification seem still to be in use. The tenor in the *Tosca* rehearsals I observed for example rose from the prostrate position exactly as Shea describes (1915, p. 53). Shea may be regarded as having gone too far in his attempt at codification. He is prescriptive, ascribing particular meanings to particular gestures described in great detail and often describing scenes from specific operas giving meticulous instruction as to how they should be performed. This is now regarded as the territory of the director and Shea's suggestions have thus become museum pieces.

Much of what Shea has to say refers to flow, which I found relevant to my investigation and to a sensibility towards opera as distinct from theatre. Shea's sense of flow concerns moving without interruption, of going along with the music. In discussing Laban's practice, Jean Newlove (1993, pp.46-51) makes a distinction between "free" and "bound" flow in movement where free flow is either driven by momentum and could not be stopped or is performed with such confidence that the performer sees no reason to stop, while bound flow could be voluntarily stopped or paused, or may stop because of caution on the part of the performer. The operatic, being attached to the music, perhaps occupies a space between bound and free flow in that it is possible for it to stop while music continues but this creates a rupture of sorts, with the capacity for the generation of additional dramatic meaning.¹³

In Shea's final chapter, where I consider he positions himself in opposition to ideas of naturalism, he speaks about the notion of the "fourth wall" and how the partisans of 'reform in acting' imagine that the audience does not exist.

... nevertheless, the audience do exist, and lyric actors, especially, must sing towards it ... If the words of your song are addressed to a person up-stage or to one side of you, you must impress the audience as singing to that person (or object) while, in reality, you are turned $\frac{3}{4}$ towards the footlights, i.e. practically facing the audience. To convey this impression you must, in the measure of music immediately preceding your song, turn directly to the object or person addressed and, having thus established definitely in the mind of the public the link between yourself and the "addressee," you then, as you begin to sing, turn gradually towards the audience. (Shea: 1915, p. 83)

This practice influenced the movement in relation to the crucifix and between the dancers in the final duet in *French Collection*. It was also observed repeatedly in

¹³ In Chapter Three opera singers responding to interviews, describe a sense of being 'carried away in the moment' which is reminiscent of Psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) description of flow as a state of intrinsic motivation.

opera performances and rehearsals during the field studies. There were occasions on which singers were required by directors to sing upstage and this was a major source of tension and conflict between the need of the singer (to be heard without undue stress on the vocal chords) and the will of the director. The positioning of the front of the body to the audience is also important in particularly difficult passages of music where the singer needs to be able to see the conductor and many discussions in rehearsals revolved around sightlines to conductor or to an offstage monitor on which the conductor was conveyed. This artificial, two dimensional quality of operatic blocking creates patterns of stage topography and spatial relations between objects and performers not usually found in conventional theatre. *French Collection* confirmed for me the idea that directors of opera could benefit from an operatic mode of performance that incorporates these ideas rather than resisting them with an alien need for naturalism or blocking derived from theatre.

Chapter Three: Embodiment

{Act II}

In this chapter I address issues relating to embodiment in my search for the operatic. I begin by contextualising the use of the term embodiment in my practice. I then highlight examples of directorial instruction akin to embodiment techniques that I observed in opera rehearsals during the field studies and discuss the outcomes of a workshop designed to question whether embodiment techniques are compatible with the other needs of opera performers. This chapter furthermore explores the second line of enquiry through discussion of an experiment designed to engender operatic movement in non-singing performers. This was executed through a process of identifying operatic movement in opera and then developing *Butoh-fu*-like images (opera-fu) to recreate those ways of moving in non-singing performers.

I have not used the term embodiment in the title of this chapter in order to navigate the contended philosophical territory of the body/mind divide. My position, simply put, is that the mind is a part of the body and not separate from it. In my application of the term embodiment I am referring to the kind of embodiment techniques used in a practical way in my performance practice. Butoh, a major influence in my practice, is rooted in Zen philosophy, and involves concepts of dependent origination and non-anthropocentric being, the world as a system of relationships, none with priority. Therefore the philosophy underpinning Butoh does not recognise a split between the mind and body, but does rely on a concept of 'embodiment' for the generation of movement (which may also be stillness). In my practical experience of Butoh, the body is, through a series of meditative

preparations, 'emptied', prior to performance. The Butoh body is regarded as being akin to a vessel into which poetic concepts and images might then be introduced and responded to through what is widely termed 'embodiment' within the practice as I have encountered it. Butoh practitioners are encouraged when training to undertake this process of embodiment without thinking, but through simply letting the body respond to the images and concepts that have been introduced. It is not then a question of having no mind in a body, which would imply a mind/body split in the first place, but in fact a quieting of the mind (as an aspect of the body), and a bringing of the mind into the moment, and into space, to such a degree as the functions of the mind and those of the rest of the body are indistinguishable. On a practical level, reference to embodiment in my practice, is to the process of visualising an image or a concept and then allowing the body to respond to it, to take it in and see where the body is led as a result. Not a mimetic process of engaging the mind in pretending to be that thing, but rather a process of allowing movement to be enabled by the thought of that thing as if the body were the thought.

Embodiment techniques observed in opera rehearsals

Alicia Frost, movement director on the English Touring Opera production of *L'assedio di Calais* expressed directly when asked about embodiment, "singers are not good at embodiment" (2013). This may be the case simply because singers are infrequently exposed to the concept of, and training in, embodiment. Out of eighteen opera singers that I interviewed, only one had ever received any training in what might be termed embodiment:

There was a programme called Opera Works in the States ... we would do these improvisational movement sessions where you would let the music take you ... there was no wrong choice. And it got you to listen, number one, to the quality and texture of the music and not censor yourself ... It was a powerful thing. (McPherson, 2013)

I also encountered a few instances where directors used *Butoh-fu* type images to try to inspire movement or to explain what it was they wanted from a singer in terms of movement. Perhaps the clearest example was during rehearsals of *Simon Boccanegra* with English Touring Opera. On 13th February 2013, director James Conway, while trying to encourage a singer to collapse slowly to the ground, offered the following image, reminiscent of a *Butoh-fu*, to bring out the desired quality of movement: "It is like acid being poured on metal." The singer however, responded by asking about his character's psychological motivation and made no attempt to embody the image as a means to inspire movement.

Another example of the use of 'poetic' images that inspire movement occurred during rehearsals of *Peter Grimes* with Opera North. The director, Phyllida Lloyd, had created a short-hand for directing the movement of members of the chorus that included such images as "walking through mud" and "the washing machine" (2013). The former, was reminiscent of a *Butoh-fu*, of the type that engages with the elements as a way of engendering movement. The latter, a more urban and domestic image, acted as a blocking instruction that inspired members of the chorus to move about in tight circles that delivered them repeatedly to the forestage, and it also referred to the frenzied, tumbling, wet and heavy qualities of the laundry – qualities that might then be incorporated into the quality of movement of the chorus members. In these examples the performers did engage with the images in order to

inspire a certain quality of movement that also suited the respective passages of music they were singing.

I concluded that techniques of embodiment, of the kind I would recognise in my practice, are only occasionally evoked in operatic directorial processes. The question remained therefore, whether or not opera singers might find training in embodiment useful or if it would be incompatible with the other requirements of singers in performance.

Wolverhampton workshop

To explore this question I arranged a workshop with members of English Touring Opera to coincide with their tour to Wolverhampton in April 2013. Eight singers, mostly from the chorus attended, but most had experience singing principal roles in small productions and minor roles with larger companies. The workshop began with a generic warm-up of stretches and articulations followed by a Butoh style warm-up of energy release, through 'throwing' the hands and feet away from the body and bobbing on the spot. This was followed by a warm-up for the feet in which participants were asked to use different parts of the feet; ball, heel, inner and outer sides in various combinations, to walk on whilst observing the changes that subsequently occurred in the body. The participants were introduced to some basic Butoh techniques including slow walking meditations, which were then developed into the more formal walking technique of *hokotai* common to Noh and Butoh. In *hokotai* the soles of the feet remain parallel to the floor and lift only slightly off the floor and then float forward, heel to toe. The training walks used in the

workshop align with the postural demands identified by singers in Chapter Two because the step is slow and stable, the body remains relaxed, arms hanging loose but away from the body, neck relaxed, head suspended, face and eyes relaxed, and body vertical. Though slow, the movement forward should be constant, the body floating over the feet. A performer would be able, if necessary, to sing whilst engaging in *hokotai*. These technical exercises were followed by embodiment exercises and participants were then given a sequence of images to embody while music from opera was played. In the more free form embodiment exercises the body is often distorted and here, in a practical application of these exercises whilst singing, a performer would need to prioritise the maintenance of their instrument over the shapes occurring in the body as a result of the engagement with the embodiment of the *Butoh-fu*.

Four participants completed feedback forms. None had prior practical experience of Butoh. All the respondents found the warm-up useful. Andrew Glover found that “the warm up has obvious practical applications” (2013) while Emma Watkinson commented: “I enjoyed the warm-ups/stretchers along with the more meditative movements. It helped me feel more in tune with my movement” (2013). Helen Johnson said: “I will definitely use the warm-up for releasing muscles before singing,” and continued, “I really liked the walking through your life exercise” (2013). Here she refers to the *hokotai* undertaken while imagining you are walking through your life timeline, into death and beyond. It is a meditation designed to focus the mind on the present by letting go of memories of the past and hopes for the future. This contributes to the process of ‘emptying’ the body prior to

undertaking Butoh and is a meditation I routinely undertake in rehearsal and prior to performance.

While observing singers in rehearsal (all companies) I never witnessed a physical warm-up prior to the studio rehearsals which I attended. I cannot say if this was also the case for stage rehearsals as I did not see the singers in their dressing rooms prior to being on stage. When I asked singers in the workshop, and those I interviewed, what warm-ups they routinely undertook prior to performance the responses varied enormously. Four interview respondents did no physical preparation whatever. Two others "walked" as their physical preparation. Most however did some form of stretching but it was often very limited, "a spine roll", "leg bends" and "shoulder rotations" which were three answers from three separate respondents. Only two respondents prepared for performance with a substantial warm-up involving yoga or Pilates. Three singers that I witnessed in rehearsal did stretches throughout stage rehearsals. Overall, from talking with singers, undertaking workshops and through observing rehearsals, it appeared that despite the fact that most had been exposed to some kind of physical training very few undertook a physical warm-up appropriate to the level of physicality expected of them in performance. However, I did not witness a correlation between engagement with warm-ups and occurrences of operatic movement.

When asked directly if any aspect of the workshop could be usefully applied in performance three mentioned "grounding" and "fluidity", two had found the exercise of walking in different ways on different parts of the feet very revealing in terms of

character but also in terms of grounding and awareness of weight and therefore useful for release of muscle tension. In terms of answering the main question which the workshop addressed for the research (are embodiment techniques compatible with the other needs of singers?) two responses referred to embodiment and imagining. When responding to the question: "Is there anything about this form that you think you could usefully apply when performing in opera?" Glover answered: "Finding clear images to respond to, freeing the body and mind to create more organically; bringing about states and experiences which might otherwise not be considered" (2013). While Johnson wrote: "Visualisation" (2013). She also alluded to the source of an anxiety I often encountered when interviewing singers, that the opera singer has multiple considerations in performance.

Singers are restricted in their movement by the pure physicality of singing. If [only] there were easier ways to think about what your body needs to do whilst you're also trying to remember all the language/meaning of the text, plus your intention whilst absorbing a director's ideas and doing the necessary stuff for the process of producing your voice. (Johnson: 2013)

This point is compounded, as was revealed by other singers, by the need to pay attention to the conductor and move about in a stage space among objects that they may only have had a few hours to rehearse in.

It is clear that singing performers in opera have many considerations to balance. What I concluded from the workshop was that embodiment techniques derived from Butoh are compatible with the performance of opera but, they should not be an additional consideration for the singer – rather, that if they were to be introduced to training or as part of a production process, they should respect the physical needs of singing (for there are many Butoh contortions that would not) and replace acting

techniques that require an additional thought process concerning motivation and internal psychological response to a dramatic situation. The singing actor in opera is required to remain fully aware of the technical demands of singing and the musical articulation as maintained in performance by the conductor. This is a radically different situation to actors in theatre who adopt stewardship of the performance among the company of actors on stage while performing.

It is worth noting that there were two kinds of embodiment being considered during the workshop. The first is the visualisation of *Butoh-fu* which would not necessarily relate directly to character, motivation or narrative, but which would use a series of images to help create forms visible in the body of the performer. These forms would be unique in each singer's body, dictated by personal physical aptitude and the physical demands of vocal production. A series of images would thereby inspire a series of physical forms; externally visible expressions of character and plot generated through a *Butoh-fu* score which would not require engagement with internal emotional states. Workshop participants did exercises exploring this process. The results were clear and expressive and singers found the scores easy to remember and execute. In a hypothetical rehearsal process I foresee that such a technique could replace the need for internal motivation generated through 'thinking' with a series of internalised images that could be attached to phrases within the music and placed, like the voice and along with the voice, with due consideration for breathing and support.

The second type of embodiment under consideration during the workshop and as an aspect of the research is the embodiment of music itself. Phrasing and volume contribute to mood and atmosphere, for example; each of which affects the body of the performer. I refer here not just to the music that performers are themselves singing but also to that which they hear generated in the orchestra and by other singers. Consideration of this aspect of embodiment led to a finding of the research which is discussed in Chapter Four: Operatic Emergence (see p. 126).

Developing opera-fu

I began the research intending to test if *Butoh-fu*-like embodiment images offered a model for formulating a non-foundational method of generating operaticness in the bodies of non-singers through the development of 'opera-fu'. This involved making sketches of, and taking notes on, how opera singers held their bodies and moved, and then re-enacting those movements and 'reading' my own body to see what images came to mind. These images were then offered to other dancers in order to see if they arrived at a similar corporeal response. In a variation of the experiment sometimes dancers were encouraged to work directly from sketches and to find their own opera-fu, which they could then develop and use as a means to notate choreography.

As an example of operaticness observed in opera singers and then transformed into an 'opera-fu', slow arching and sweeping gestures of the arms, with relaxed hands, that adhere to the phrasing of the music, form a commonly performed aspect of operatic movement. The body is, as a result of the action of singing, held mostly

vertically, (or pivoted and angled without distortion of the torso) unbending from larynx to pelvic floor. The arms and head become the principal tools of corporeal expression. Where Shea (1915) offers detailed instructions on arm movements and attaches meaning to certain combinations of relation of body parts, I propose a less rigid description and suggest mindfulness of certain images that might help engender a sense of operatic movement. However, the variations that Shea suggests, such as leading with the forearm, lead to interesting physical material for singers and dancers alike. The arm, utilised so much in operatic expression, can be led by hand, wrist, forearm, elbow or upper arm or shoulder. One of the valuable lessons from Shea that I find especially relevant to preserve as an aspect of operatic movement, is the idea of “deferred completion” (1915, p. 26) where:

... the arm describes a more or less complicated movement and has taken its final position before the last flick of the hand, or of the forearm and hand, completes and gives point to the gesture. ... The upper arm reaches first its final position; then the forearm is swung into completion, save for its final rotation, which swings the arm and hand into position. (Shea: 1915, p. 26)

Shea’s description of deferred completion is very similar to the notion of *Jo-ha-kyū* found in Kabuki and Noh theatre, which leads to the impression of a certain flow of movement from core to extremity as well as bringing an internal rhythm to movement that sees each gesture as separate but continual. This approach is very suitable to movement that is accompanied by music or which is intended to be made in response to music.

One of the first groups of opera-fu that I developed concerned the movement of the arms led by the hands. These were commonly encountered gestures during the research that occurred in the bodies of many singers in a variety of dramatic

situations. Typically arms are kept away from the body and the hands draw arcs through the air, which the arm, held in a gentle curve, follows. The joint most utilised is the shoulder, however the palm of the hand leads this movement but into the back of the hand. It is as if something were issuing from the palm which propels the hand backward. I imagined the palm as producing candy-floss which then pushes the hand back gently, but simultaneously the palm is engaged in producing imaginary, supposedly structurally stable, arches of candy-floss into or through which the performer then walks. This image, the 'candy-floss machine', does several things. Firstly the palm is open and the hand and wrist relaxed. The movement opens the body, which is good for posture and breathing when singing. The arms carve through space, creating invisible structures that are asymmetrical but consistent, bringing an awareness of the body in space. The body of the singer as it then walks into the candy-floss structures experiences the gentle collapse of space (those imaginary structures) surrounding them and the gentle, sticky, sweet texture of the candy-floss as it melts on the skin and releases a pungent, sweet aroma. The end of an arc is signalled through the relaxed wrist which causes the hand to fall back, palm up, which closes the fingers at the end of an outward stroke – or it falls down, palm down, which also closes the fingers, on the inward stroke. Only as the candy-floss begins to issue from the palm again will the hand actively open and the next arc begin.



Fig. 12: *Anna Bolena*, studio rehearsal, Wales Millennium Centre, July 2013. Alternately, the hands sweep from the centre of the body to the side as the performer advances downstage. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

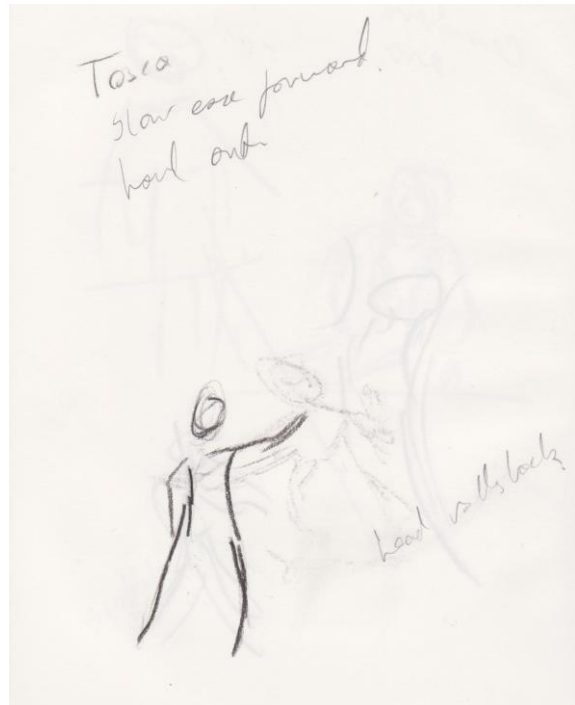


Fig. 13: *Tosca* orchestra stage rehearsal, Royal Opera House, July 2013. With a larger sweep of the arm the arc carves out an imaginary candy-floss arc akin to an architectural structure through which the figure may then advance. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

While observing [See Fig. 12] a singer rehearse the character of Smeaton in *Anna Bolena* I began to formulate an idea of the candy-floss machine as a way of recreating the sense of movement observed. As she moves forward, on each step the arm is swept outwards from the centre. This motion became the 'candy-floss machine' opera-fu. Similarly, [See Fig. 13] my notes on Tosca's movement contributed to the formulation of the 'candy-floss machine' which I am seen executing in *Admiring La Stupenda* [See Fig 14].



Fig. 14: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*. The hands have been propelled outward from the centre, by the imaginary issuing of candy-floss from the palms. Once at the outward position shown, 'headlamps' in the palms aid in the maintaining of the position, especially regarding the relation of the palm of the hand to the face. November 2013, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

The palm also features in an opera-fu that I called 'headlamps' [See Fig. 14]. This assists in the positioning of the palm in relation to the face. There is an imaginary headlamp in the palm of each hand and another on the face of the singer or performer. These headlamps illuminate what they point towards but also the beams are imagined as visible, perhaps even architectural, a way of manipulating space. The singer has many options for how to use this image. If the hands are positioned as if to illuminate the ground a metre or two from the singer and the face lamp also searches this area it may create, for example, a sense of being lost or confused. I recognised this use of 'headlamps' and made sketches of Cavaradossi in *Tosca*, and Peter in *Peter Grimes* [See Fig. 15 & Fig. 16].

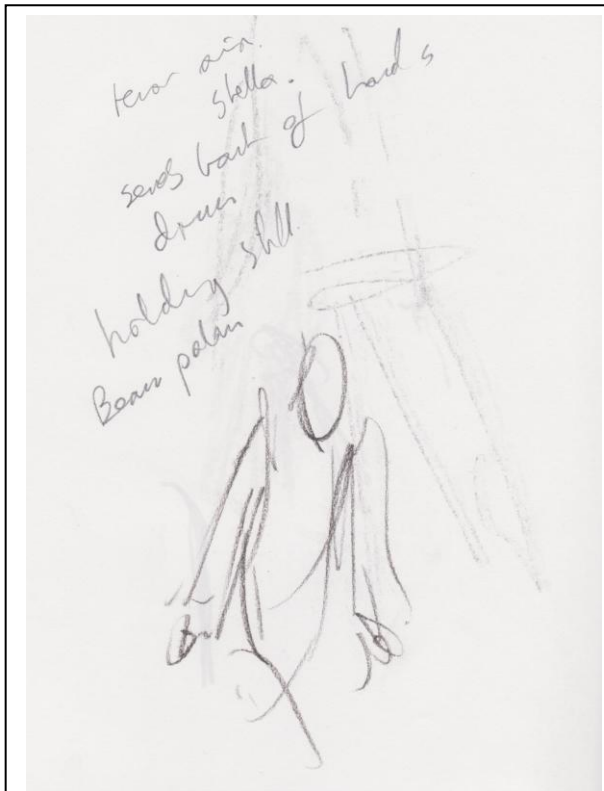


Fig. 15: *Tosca*, dress rehearsal, Royal Opera House, July 2013. Kneeling, Cavarodossi looks down (face headlamp illuminating the floor in front of him) with palm headlamps facing upwards, which may be read in the context of his aria, as an appeal to heaven. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.



Fig 16: *Peter Grimes*, stage orchestra rehearsal, Opera North, Leeds, September 2013. Peter, during his 'mad scene' looks down at the floor in front of him, while the 'headlamps' in his palms search the floor around his feet. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

The face headlamp pointed in another direction may create a sense that the space is opened up and the character may then be read as more conflicted, with a dual sense of intention. When the beams of light are all sent out into the auditorium, space is extended and the body is positioned at the apex of the beams that penetrate the auditorium. This was used spectacularly for the entrance of Scarpia in *Tosca* [See Fig. 17].



Fig. 17: *Tosca*, stage orchestra rehearsal, Royal Opera House, July 2013. Scarpia's entrance, which is made centre stage, on an upper level of the set, is enhanced by the singer gazing outward into the auditorium and the palms of the hands also facing outward. In this moment the embodied notion of the headlamps in the palms place Scarpia at the apex of the imagined beams and at the centre of the action. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

I can be seen using the same configuration of beams (although my head is held at a slightly different angle) in *French Collection*. Palms and face send 'headlamp' beams into the auditorium opening up the space [See Fig. 18].



Fig. 18: Daniel Somerville in *French Collection*. Using the embodied notion of the 'headlamps' in palms and face, the space of the auditorium is penetrated and the figure is placed at the apex of the beams. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

These beams may also be drawn towards the singer; palms illuminating at close quarters the stomach, with hands drawing diagonally across the body, or the chest, décolletage or throat, as can be seen in sketches from *Anna Bolena* [See Fig. 19 & Fig. 20]. The hands are not touching the body, or clutching, but gently hovering across the torso.



Fig. 19: *Anna Bolena*, stage piano rehearsal, Wales Millennium Centre, August 2013. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.



Fig. 20: *Anna Bolena*, stage piano rehearsal, Wales Millennium Centre, August 2013. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

When employing this image it is not just a question of positioning the palms, but of using the image of the beams to firstly manipulate space and secondly to create a quality of movement that is deliberate and connected to the space. The arbitrary flinging about of arms that I witnessed whenever I invited workshop participants (those who were not themselves singers) to move as they imagined opera singers to move, became a precise and intentional bound flow once the image of the beams was introduced.

Perhaps the most common example of operatic movement I observed in performances and rehearsals could be easily recreated using the 'headlamp' image. On dozens of occasions when a character exited upstage leaving another character downstage, one arm of the remaining character would follow the exiting character (sending a beam up and off stage) and extending the arm behind the onstage singer, while the other arm sent a beam of light into the sternum or chest of the onstage singer. This position may linger for several moments after the other character has exited becoming akin to a Brechtian *gestus* of absence, loss, regret or longing [See Fig. 21]. I identify this gesture in particular as a residue of what Shea (1915) describes and which I refer to when discussing *French Collection* as resulting from the convention of maintaining the front of the body as visible to the audience while indicating a connection to an absent referent, character or object.

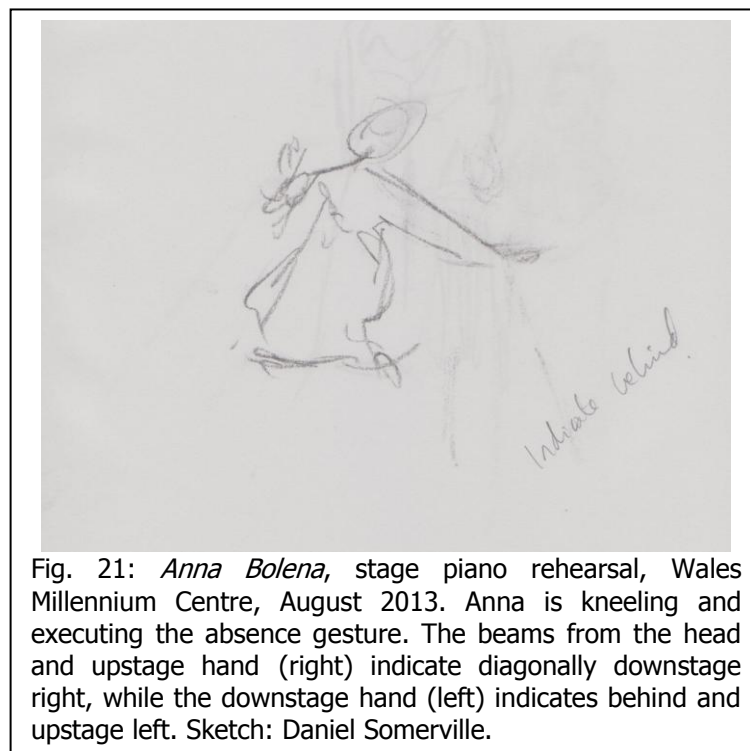


Fig. 21: *Anna Bolena*, stage piano rehearsal, Wales Millennium Centre, August 2013. Anna is kneeling and executing the absence gesture. The beams from the head and upstage hand (right) indicate diagonally downstage right, while the downstage hand (left) indicates behind and upstage left. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

I can be seen using the headlamps in the form of the absence gesture to indicate towards the character behind me (and simultaneously the crucifix) in scene one of *French Collection* [See Fig. 22].



Fig. 22: Daniel Somerville and Paul Vigg in *French Collection*. The stage left figure indicates behind and upstage right towards the character he is leaving behind. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

The final palm related opera-fu is the 'stick in palm'. An imaginary vertical stick is held in the palm of the hand and pushed into the ground. This image creates rigidity in arm, and fingers, while also keeping the fingers open. The performer is grounded by the gesture, and may be read as 'standing their ground' or 'making a point' – the motion also travels upwardly through the back of the arm, shoulder and into the neck stiffening and even arching the back of the neck (crucially leaving the front of the neck relaxed for singing). The imaginary stick travels downward out of the palm but is also embodied upwardly through the arm to the neck, raising the back of the head. This position is firm and strong but keeps all the internal mechanisms for singing free and open.

The character of Ortrud in *Lohengrin* is captured in a sketch, [See Fig. 23] gesturing with both hands in a way that led me to develop 'stick in palm'. Julia Fitzpatrick is seen executing 'stick in palm' with one hand during *Mozart solo No. 1* [See Fig. 24].

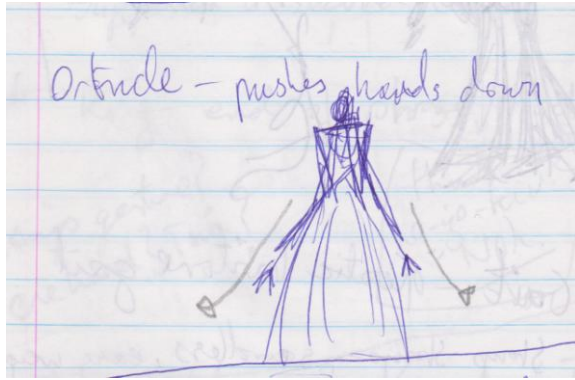


Fig. 23: *Lohengrin*, stage piano rehearsal Wales Millennium Centre, May 2013. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.



Fig. 24: Julia Fitzpatrick in *Mozart solo No. 1* The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton, November 2012. Photo: Jemima Yong.

Dancing operatically

In the spring of 2013 I undertook a series of devising sessions with two dancers, Shauna Tunstall and Charlotte Morewood, who were, at the time, students at the University of Wolverhampton.¹ Initially I asked them to each present a short piece of choreography, set to a piece of opera, in a dance style of their choice. Similarly to how I had worked with dancers from different disciplines in *Mad Scene*, I began by editing the work they presented – slowing parts down, trimming away some others, seeking always the more expressive and less formulaic aspects of the movement. I also introduced the dancers to some Butoh techniques similar to those described in the section on the Wolverhampton workshop with English Touring Opera. Shauna, more familiar with street dance styles was generally more grounded

¹ See accompanying DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Former Practice and Research Workshops and Projects' for a short video 'Project – duet' showing excerpts of work developed during these sessions.

and familiar with the kinds of slowed movement that sometimes occurs in dub-step, for example, as a way into the slow and grounded aspects of Butoh. Charlotte was more inclined towards rapid, fluid, acrobatic movement which requires momentum and therefore she found the slower aspects of what we worked on more challenging. Over a series of weekly sessions we began to develop several pieces of physical material and ordered and re-ordered them, experimenting with different pieces of music. I was interested to see if operaticness might occur simply as a result of exposure to the music, which neither dancer was familiar with at the start of the project. This did not occur. However, towards the end of the project we worked on using opera-fu along with due recognition of the restrictions imposed on the body by the act of singing. In combination with the prolonged exposure to *hokotai* (which we practiced at every session) and the grounded and meditative aspects of Butoh some sense of the operatic did start to occur.²

On the last day of the project I interviewed the two dancers. Shauna, responding to a question about her level of knowledge of opera prior to the project said:

I normally see opera as something that's very [pause] posh [laughs]. So I never thought you could do any type of dance to opera music. I didn't think I'd like it. I didn't think I would connect with it in the way that I have done ... I didn't realise that opera told a story. And I didn't realise that when opera singers are actually on stage that they have to command the stage as well as sing. (Tunstall: 2013)

The point about command of the stage was echoed by Charlotte in her comments about controlling the audience. "I didn't realise how much control you have over it [the audience]. When I was watching you do it and when you moved your hand,

² Refer again to the accompanying DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Former Practice and Research Workshops and Projects' for a short video 'Project – duet' showing excerpts of work developed during these sessions.

that was where you went with it – you just completely controlled what you wanted us to see.” (Morewood: 2013). Both dancers felt that meaning given to the movements that were being executed was interesting. Charlotte elaborated: “I didn’t realise how much the movement meant. I thought they were just throwing their arms about ... but it actually means something – like when you hold your hand to your chest” (Morewood: 2013). At this point in the interview Shauna demonstrated the ‘absence’ gesture which I described above. “Like when you’re pointing to someone to say that’s them, but now this is me [drawing the attention of the audience]” (Tunstall: 2013). I asked them directly if they had developed a sense of what operatic meant in terms of movement: “It’s something which is very controlled because in operatic movement you’ve got to think about not just the way your body moves but you’ve got to think about not cutting off your instrument ... crunching your neck to cut it off” (Tunstall: 2013).

As a result of the workshops Charlotte had found exercises to do with focus very useful in appreciating internal musculature and certain details of hand movements, while Shauna expressed how useful she found the use of images to create a quality of movement. With Shauna I had worked slightly differently in some sessions.³ Rather than giving her opera-fu to work with, we looked at sketches I had made of the rehearsals of *Simon Boccanegra* with English Touring Opera [See Fig. 25 & Fig. 26]. I was particularly interested in the scene where Boccanegra dies. Craig Smith who played Boccanegra, had created some very interesting shapes in which,

³ See accompanying DVD ‘Daniel Somerville: Former Practice and Research Workshops and Projects’ for a short video ‘Project – sketches’.

bending at the top of the leg he had sent his weight forward over his feet. He had also created various contortions from kneeling positions and leaning against a chair.



Fig. 25: *Simon Boccanegra*, studio rehearsal, English Touring Opera, February 2013. Some of the shapes created by Craig Smith in Boccanegra's death scene, captured in line drawings and then used to create opera-fu for dancers to use to engender the forms. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.



Fig. 26: *Simon Boccanegra*, studio rehearsal, English Touring Opera, February 2013. Some of the shapes created by Craig Smith in Boccanegra's death scene, captured in line drawings and then used to create opera-fu for dancers to use. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

The shapes were vivid and expressive, very reminiscent of the unbalanced, body-in-crisis of Butoh, but nonetheless they respected the needs of the instrument. Shauna worked from these sketches to arrive at opera-fu which she created and named, for a short piece of choreography. 'Wringing wet towel' created a twist and release

movement with arms crossed in front of her chest and down through the legs, which was then also performed with arms open and the twist running through the arms from hand to hand. 'Broken mannequin' allowed her to keep her feet and legs still but to bend at the top of the legs and recreate the angularity of the sketches I had made of Smith's performances. The opera-fu that Shauna developed related very specifically to Smith's performance as mediated by my sketches and therefore to his particular set of skills and portrayal of character in this role that I had witnessed. They did nonetheless contain elements that I saw executed by other singers. The exercise enabled Shauna, through the use of her opera-fu, to arrive at a movement expression that captured something of a sense of the scene and the operatic nature of the moment as I had witnessed it, without simply copying the forms illustrated in the sketches.

The problem was that the choreography we had arrived at was still for me influenced heavily by Shauna's training in dance. We had derived movement from opera but it was not operatic as I had identified in the bodies of singers. Overall the sessions spent with Charlotte and Shauna taught me a great deal about the usefulness of combining Butoh techniques and notions of embodiment with other forms. This was something I had experienced before, when creating *Mad Scene*. What these sessions also revealed was the potential for creating choreography with the sketches I had made of opera singers. The problem perhaps was, that I needed to focus less on form and more on flow of movement when sketching. The opera-fu, when tested with dancers had yielded some degree of success in making the dancers think they were operatic, though that thought did not always translate into

them looking more operatic by my criteria. When combined with the carriage and deportment necessary for maintaining the integrity of an imaginary vocal instrument there were aspects of the movement that began to approach what I was seeking. It was however the addition of information regarding the singer's relation to the audience that most changed the bodies of the dancers – it was ultimately the “commanding of the stage” that appeared to bring out the most operatic incidences – an indication that more work in developing the sensitivity of the singer in the dancer was necessary.

Concerning the first line of enquiry regarding the training of singers, I concluded that training in embodiment techniques does not commonly form part of the training of opera singers and is only rarely used in directorial processes. However, when tested in the Wolverhampton workshop with English Touring Opera, singers found embodiment techniques complemented and did not interrupt the other physical needs of vocal production and was conducive to the generation of movement. Embodiment techniques are therefore a potential alternative to naturalistic theatre techniques for developing character and stage action in opera. The second line of enquiry led me to engage with embodiment from the perspective of the dancer. I developed opera-fu from my observation of singers and used them to engender operatic movement in dancers. This experiment was only partially successful and showed that opera-fu and knowledge of the singing body alone were not sufficient to bring about operatic movement in non-singers as I had observed it in singers. At this point in the narrative of the research it became evident that there were other processes that contributed to the genesis of the operatic in opera.

Practice Three: Butterfly Ghost

{*Divertissement*}

The third example of practice is *Butterfly Ghost*. At this point the reader is invited to view documentation of a performance at Chisenhale Dance Space available on the accompanying DVD⁴ to be viewed now or after reading this section.

The work engages with notions of embodiment raised in Chapter Three in two ways. Firstly, I am continuing my investigation of how I might embody music and allow music to lead the body and to cause certain movements, however small, to occur according to the musical articulation and be affected by colouration, volume and dramatic emphasis in the vocal line. Secondly, within the choreography I am using Butoh-derived techniques of embodiment of concepts and ideas. In particular, *Butterfly Ghost* is an attempt to engage with the question of interculturalism in my practice and in opera.

Schechner refers to a “horizontal interculturalism” (2002, p. 245) as exemplified by the work of Barba, which resists the essentialist project of Grotowski’s “vertical interculturalism” (2002, p. 244). While both practitioners make connections across cultures and performance practices from those cultures, the vertical model assumes an original and universal culture, while the horizontal model accepts differences in cultures but attempts to “combine the practices of one culture with those of one or more others” (Allain & Harvie (Eds): 2006, p. 164). In my own practice, through combining a movement style which has origins in Japanese performance and

⁴ See DVD ‘Daniel Somerville: Practice’ – *Butterfly Ghost* is on first page of the Works menu.

philosophy, with movement derived from a European art form, I am considering it a kind of intercultural hybridisation. However, I am conscious that I have also, in the introduction to this thesis, argued that Butoh may be regarded as non-culturally specific, in some part through its emergence in and performance by, individual bodies other than those that are ethnically Japanese. It may be argued that the position I take on Butoh, which regards it not as a Japanese form, but as form originating in Japan, is itself a Eurocentric perspective. Correspondingly, the fact that Butoh was, in part a reclaiming of the Japanese body in the face of Imperialist intervention by the West, highlights issues of ethnicity when the Occidental body engages in Butoh. One's position on whether or not Butoh is Japanese will therefore have a bearing on the reading of my practice as intercultural. In terms of the activities occurring prior to performance – meditative and yoga related warm-ups, for example – my practice is intercultural in the same way as much contemporary performance may be regarded so since the experiments of Barba and Schechner in introducing these, now fairly widespread practices, that originated in Asia. However, to extend the possibility of my practice being read more firmly as intercultural in performance, and to explore questions of interculturalism in my work and in opera, I developed *Butterfly Ghost* using training in Noh and Kabuki which are more clearly culturally Japanese than Butoh.

The question is also raised as to how opera itself may be thought of as intercultural when it engages with subjects and influences that are non-European. Opera is without question guilty of exoticism within what Edward Said termed "Orientalism" (1978), which stresses Eurocentrism and the impulse to exoticise 'the other'.

I would argue however, that in certain cases opera uses other cultures syncretically to convey an intercultural perspective – Puccini's inclusion of musical motifs borrowed from Japanese classical and folk music in *Madama Butterfly* for example. One of European opera's main thematic concerns is with 'the other' and Till (2012) points out that in *Madama Butterfly* (among other operas) 'the other' is represented through an exogamic relationship with a Western man and a 'native' female (2012: p. 304). Clément concurs, using *Madama Butterfly* as an example of the convergence of exoticism, Imperialism and misogyny:

Butterfly, a foreigner to the Occident, but who makes herself a foreigner in her own land by marrying a man whose name – not of her land – she openly claims. Butterfly, whose Japanese name is masked in Italian by the English signifier for an insect, regains her country at the same time she dies a Japanese death. (Clément: 1988, p. 58)

I was therefore mindful of the already Orientalist and intercultural aspects of *Madama Butterfly* from which I selected the love duet in Act I as the music to accompany *Butterfly Ghost*.

These issues and debates on bodies, ethnicities and cultures I intended should collide within the performance. They are presented in order to invite the viewer to draw their own conclusions about the work and these positions, with due consideration for their own cultural perspective. The performance playfully oscillates between positions depending upon what movement techniques I am employing at any given time. In this way the techniques I am employing are recognised as having cultural origins in order that they may combine in one body. It is not therefore a collaboration of artists from different cultures which causes me to consider the work intercultural but the hybridisation of techniques that occur in the

work. In this case my interculturalism might evoke the interculturalism of Wole Soyinka, in which he “pioneers a new dramaturgy that acknowledges the hybridity of post-colonial expression and experience” (Allain & Harvie (Eds): 2006, p. 65). Though I cannot claim to hold the authority of the post-colonial subject as is the case with Soyinka, the interculturalism of my practice is still concerned with the possibility of a combination of performance techniques from different cultures being combined in one body. This may also perhaps cause cultural confusion with the possibility of destabilising Eurocentrism or at least confronting the spectator with their own preconceptions on the cultural aspects of the performance styles and techniques presented.

The image I present is cross-dressed and so highlights the instability of gender categorisation alongside this proposed intercultural confusion. The work is, in places, deliberately Orientalist in its employment of a gestural language closer to pantomimic expressions of the submissive, coy, Japanese female. The work is also performed with an awareness of the Orientalism of *Madama Butterfly* explored by Hwang in *M Butterfly*.⁵ *Butterfly Ghost* exists between these theoretical standpoints on interculturalism and simultaneously at the intersection of post-colonial and queer theories where the decentering of heteronormative Eurocentrism becomes the imperative common goal. The audience can respond depending upon their pre-existing notions in relation to race, culture, gender, opera and movement. The work seeks to expose prejudice as well as bridge divergent positions.

⁵ In his play *M Butterfly* (1988) David Henry Hwang, through the cross-dressed character of Song Lilong (a Chinese spy who seduces the French diplomat Gallimard while masquerading as an opera singer) critiques Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* on the grounds of it being an “Orientalist fantasy”.

In preparation for *Butterfly Ghost* I undertook a two day workshop in Noh theatre techniques with Professor Richard Emmert of Musashino University of Tokyo at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London. I also watched videos of Kabuki (2011) and in particular the cross-dressed tradition of *onnagata* and watched Lindsey Kemp's ballet of that name (1991). Rudimentary aspects of Noh and Kabuki were then incorporated into the choreography alongside, Butoh and operatic movement derived from the opera-fu I had created, as well as my developing notion of the operatic body in motion. What I presented therefore in *Butterfly Ghost* was an Occidental body, performing Japanese movement forms, set to European music concerning a Japanese subject. These layers of interculturality were further complicated by Puccini's use of Japanese motifs within the score and the mediation of my understanding of Kabuki principally through another European artist.

In terms of narrative and character I imagined a being trapped, a ghost, remembering the love duet that began a fateful relationship that ended tragically. I played the part of Cio-Cio-San from the opera but as a cross-dressed and Occidental performer. I could also have been undertaking the never-ending dance of Gallimard, who at the end of Hwang's *M Butterfly* is dressed as the Butterfly he could never otherwise possess. These two possibilities exist in one body on stage.

The narrative of the piece had one further disquieting point to make. Cio-Cio-San is only fourteen when she marries Pinkerton, an American naval officer. The wedding night being remembered in *Butterfly Ghost* is also the point at which, by standards of contemporary morality, a child is raped. Here I engage again with Clément's

critique of opera and its ability to obscure the horrendous deeds done to women (and girls) with the most beautiful music. In the latter section of *Butterfly Ghost* I employed the distorted forms of Butoh [See Fig. 27] in particular to generate a sense of anguish, struggle and torment in opposition to the sweeping lyricism of the love duet.



Fig. 27: Daniel Somerville in *Butterfly Ghost*. Distorted forms of Butoh are used to convey anguish in contrast to the lyrical music. Chisenhale Dance Space, April 2013. Photo: Jemima Yong.

Chapter Four: Operatic Emergence

{*Act III*}

In order to address the aspect of the research question concerning the theoretical and philosophical conditions under which operatic movement occurs, the third line of enquiry (begun in Chapter Two) is revisited in this chapter, where I continue to apply aspects of queer theory to opera. In this chapter I also apply a concept of 'emergence' to the research in two ways. Firstly, through theorising how opera emerges as queer even when viewed through the binary system of gender organisation which queer theory seeks to disrupt. Secondly, through further discussion of interviews and observerships, which leads to the first of three findings, which is the formulation of the operatic as being an 'emergent property'. The use of the term 'emergent property' in relation to the operatic is derived from the following analogy by Fritjof Capra (1996):

[T]he taste of sugar is not present in the carbon, hydrogen and oxygen atoms that constitute its components ... C. D. Broad coined the term 'emergent properties' for those properties that emerge at a certain level of complexity but do not exist at lower levels. (Capra: 1996, p. 28)

In the case of opera, the certain levels of complexity are the multiple creative disciplines and their intersections in the performance of opera. Primarily these creative disciplines are poetry or dramatic text, music and scenography, but also acting, movement, stagecraft, musicianship and each of the crafts that constitute scenography such as lighting, costume design and construction and many others. I am therefore suggesting that the operatic is not present in the component disciplines that make up an opera, but emerges as they intersect. Each may operate outside the performance of opera (in other performing arts) but in coalescing in the

performance of opera, they become operatic. With all the elements present and working harmoniously (to re-invoke Stanislavski's term) the operatic in terms of movement, as the specific example explored in this thesis, emerges within the body of the singer demonstrating the transformation that occurs at the intersection of disciplines and resulting in the 'operatic moment' that I evoked in the introduction (see p. 3).

Becoming opera through the operatic

In Chapter Two I posited that the category of opera is defined by what is produced in the opera house, which is governed by a process, analogous with the sedimentation processes of gender construction, described by Butler (2011) in her refining of gender performativity in *Bodies That Matter*. Performative gender construction occurs through the "stylized repetition of acts" (Butler: 2006, p. 191) which we may view in our analogy, as the productions of operas in the opera house, contributing to the construction of the category of opera. I furthermore propose that a second level of construction is at work so that not only is the category of opera constructed through live productions of works but that each work is constituted in live performance through the interaction of disciplines contributing to that *gesamtkunstwerk*, analogous to the sedimentary performative construction of gender within individual bodies. The process I am describing is one of disciplines (none of which are inherently operatic) intersecting and in doing so allowing the operatic to emerge. Operatic is not however viewed as 'pertaining to opera' (caused by opera) but as the mechanism through which opera 'becomes'. There is no 'opera'

prior to the intersections of creative disciplines and the operatic emerges at that intersection.

Butler proposes: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (2006, p. 34). Butler highlights Nietzsche's assertion that "there is no 'being' behind doing" (2003, p. 26). She believes, according to Sullivan, that "the subject is an effect rather than the cause of action" (Sullivan: 2003, p. 82). Opera, using this as an analogy, can thus be viewed as an effect, rather than the cause of the operatic. This Nietzschean reversal of causality in gender construction is premised on the notion that there is no original pre-discursive gender and no pre-discursive sexed body onto which a gender can be applied. The evidence for this lies in the very imitative nature of gender and Butler uses the example of drag to expose this: "In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself" (2006, p. 187). Continuing my analogy and applying the same terms to opera as an art form always in the process of becoming, there is no identity that is the category of opera but opera becomes through the repetition of acts and through a process of imitation that is without an original. This idea is supported when we consider that there was no 'original' opera and that the Camerata were actively 'recreating' in the Renaissance, a classical art form for which they had no complete model, only scant evidence. The very first of the productions that we now regard as operas were imitations therefore, without an original and all subsequent operas (engaged in constituting the identity/art form of opera) have been an imitation without a core identity since. Opera is thereby regarded as operating analogously to the dynamics

of gender construction as described by Butler – becoming opera through the operatic. The aspects of the operatic that are particularly interesting to me in making this argument are the non-normative performance traditions that participate in the construction of opera as a category or art form. Therefore, the performing of non-heteronormative gender within opera is an aspect of the operatic, which is participating in the performative construction of opera as a category or art form. These non-heteronormative traditions need therefore, to be considered further, for while it is possible to read opera as queer, it is more widely read as a conservative and pro-establishment for its elitist associations, and yet these two positions would appear to contradict each other.

In discussing Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" (Beauvoir in Butler: 2006, p. 11) Butler reveals that while woman is constructed through the 'becoming' process there is in that statement an implication of an agent who takes on a gender and could therefore take on a different gender in the absence of a cultural compulsion to become a woman. "There is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings" (2006, p. 11). Similarly to how Butler argues that gender may appear to be a natural extension of sex when it is not, I argue that opera can appear elitist and pro-establishment when it is in fact non-normative and subversive. The processes of heteronormative patriarchal society are so intimately linked to the architecture of the opera house that opera's subversive potential has been obscured. Furthermore, because Foucault places sex as ubiquitous in Western culture and thought: "Sex, the explanation for everything" (1976, p. 78) and Abel claims that "opera cannot pretend

it is not about sex" (1996, p. 186) the reason for the parallel relegation of alternative sexualities to the periphery of society and the relegation of erotic elements and gender subversions of opera to the realm of quaint convention and quirky performance tradition becomes clear, even when those two positions intersect in the opera house.

Two clear examples of gender queerness exist in the history of opera in the gender bending traditions of the *castrati* and *travesti*. Feldman (2000) exposes eighteenth century opera plots, and the architecture of the opera house as supporting the patriarchal and monarchical structures. However, as the eighteenth century progresses she describes how the men of the audience became otherwise engaged leaving their wives, with dubious *cicisbei* (flamboyant male escorts) accompanying them to the opera. Feldman paints a picture of women and their distinctly queer companions as the mainstay of audiences in the latter part of the eighteenth century so much so that complaints began to appear in the press (2000, p. 42). They were witnessing a stage dominated by *castrati*, high voiced male performers playing the lead characters of warriors and emperors, as well as female roles. Audiences that challenge familial and societal structures engaged in watching and hearing gender ambiguous performers. We should, however, take into account Naomi André's (2006, p. 45) observation that during the reign of the *castrati*, society was undergoing a transition from a pre-modern way of thinking about gender as one elastic sex (men and women were the same but inverted forms of each other) to a modern construction of gender as a two sex system of opposites. In this time, it was not difficult for audiences to accept male and female representation emanating from

the same body. It was not, in other words, as queer then as we may perceive it now. André also points out that hermaphrodites were feared in society and instructions were given by doctors on how to assign gender to hermaphrodite babies from as early as the Renaissance. The *castrati*, furthermore, were accepted on stage but were ridiculed off it (Abel: 1996, p.132). Opera and the opera house can therefore be viewed as liminal spaces but the subversive aspects of opera were not permitted to flow over into society or the binary dominated discourse on opera.

The demise of the *castrati* was accompanied by a rise in the *travesti* role – women playing male characters (André, 2006). Cross-dressed performers may have enjoyed the same status as *castrati* in terms of liminality, especially as they were initially often replacing them, but the roles for cross-dressed women proliferated once the convention was established and characters constructed in this way are found in the mainstay of the operatic canon in works by Mozart, Rossini, Donizetti, Verdi and Richard Strauss from the eighteenth through to the early twentieth century. *Travesti* performers, like drag for Butler, challenge gender categorisation and highlight how gender is a copy without an original. Furthermore they constitute an early example of how masculinity might be exposed as being a performance (it can, at least, be performed) rather than it being a centralised and natural behaviour resulting from maleness. Judith Halberstam (1998, pp. 256-266) uses the more recent example of drag king performance to highlight the destabilising effect of performed masculinity. Beyond exposing the unnaturalness of masculinity, cross-dressing in performance enables us also to read and re-read what is presented before us and inevitably

meanings multiply (Ferris: 1993, p. 8) and any sense of binary stability for gender or the primacy of heterosexually constructed gender norms, comes into question.

Opera therefore contains clear examples of performance strategies that may allow for a reading of opera as queer. I have used Butler's *Gender Trouble* (2006) extensively to illustrate the analogy I am employing, but as stated in the introduction my reference to *Gender Trouble* is tempered by Butler's own revisions in *Bodies That Matter* (2011) and stand alongside Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (2006) as well as referring back always to Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1976). These texts may be regarded as foundational in terms of a history of queer theory. Debates since the early 1990s in queer theory have repeatedly referred back to the origins of queer theory and questioned them on the basis of ever changing politics and practices of non-heteronormative sexuality (Sullivan: 2003). *Queer Theory* (Morland & Willox (Eds): 2005) is a collection of essays that in my view goes to illustrate how writers on queer theory struggle to escape discussion of the possible destabilising effects of non-heteronormative sexualities, genders and practices. While embracing the rallying call to "make gender trouble" (Butler: 2006, p. 46) they appear to de-emphasising the universalising potential put forward by Sedgwick (2006) and the application of the model of peripheral identities to the reorganisation of power relations proposed by Foucault (1976). I find that in the foundational texts mentioned above, there exists the possibility of extending queer thinking beyond matters of sexuality, sexual orientation, sex and gender. The invitation seems to me to be, not only to consider the analysis of the binary organisation of gender and its effects on power relations, and to thereby critique the current social paradigm in

relation to sexuality, but to use this way of thinking as a model to examine any number of subjects – in this case, opera. As an example, the binary model of gender is identified within the foundational texts as the dominant and normalising model that legitimises heterosexuality and masculinist hierarchy. I have argued that normative patriarchal influences have focussed analysis of opera on the binary conflict of words and music to the elision of other discourses in order to make it appear normative. Opera however, viewed in binary terms, may still be exposed as resistant to binary definition, when feminist discussion of gender equality in heterosexual sex is also applied. Then, binary analysis, and not only poststructuralist analysis of opera, supports the position that opera may be read as queer.

If music is gendered as feminine and text as masculine, as has been the formulation for Wagner (1850-1851), Nietzsche (1872), and Clément (1988), then the struggle for the dominance of text or music which forms the discourse on opera can be viewed as a negotiation of male and female. However, the very notion of conflict between text and music arises from this binary perspective, and blocks the possibility of a true union of text and music to create a single form, opera. A completely equal union of male (text) and female (music) in one body¹ (opera) would be metaphorically hermaphroditic or intersexual. In heteronormative binary terms, we might therefore regard the struggle for supremacy of text or music throughout the history of the discourse on opera as a desire to avoid admitting an art form that might present as disruptive through being theorised as intersexual or hermaphrodite.

¹ As opposed to a binary union brought about through metaphorical marriage or intercourse.

Nietzsche (1872) however, advocated for precisely that union, praising Act III of *Tristan und Isolde* (Wagner: 1865) as perfection through its balance of text and music, which he regarded as the restoration of tragedy. A heterosexual, heteronormative celebration of love between a man and a woman in the narrative of the opera belies the resultant blurring of gender distinctions and obscures the opera's other queer signifiers. If we consider queer theory's desire to obliterate binarism alongside feminism's discourse concerning the position of heterosexual feminism and its resistance to domination/submission binaries in heterosexual sex (Sullivan: 2003 p.119-135) then heterosexual orgasm, of the kind which is generated through a completely consensual and non-violent intercourse, (not, therefore, all heterosexual sex) is a moment where distinctions of gender melt away:

[Heterosexual] sexual pleasure involves the transgression of the supposed boundaries between self and other, subject and object, inside and outside, active and passive, power and powerlessness. As [Lynne] Segal puts it, '[i]n consensual sex when bodies meet, the epiphany of that meeting – its threat and excitement – is surely that all the great dichotomies ... slip away'. (Sullivan: 2003 p.130)

Perhaps inadvertently, Nietzsche celebrates the complete union of music and text but thereby positions opera, in that moment, as escaping gender categorisation. Furthermore, while music and text are united in the opera, Tristan and Isolde are denied their conjugal union, and longing and absence become expressions of heterosexual love.² *Tristan und Isolde*, a monument to heterosexual love, also contains a scene with King Marke in which he laments, not the loss of his bride Isolde to Tristan, but the loss of his homo-social bonds of chivalry with Tristan. Through this reading, *Tristan und Isolde* stands as both monument to heterosexual

² In *The Celluloid Closet* (1995) Vito Russo presents longing and absence as commonly used strategies to express homosexual love throughout the history of film so as to avoid actual representations of homosexuality.

love and to the potential of opera as an art form that both avoids the act of gendering and places homosocial love and heterosexual love as equal through the use of absence as a metaphor for those desires.

Continuing with this reading of the art form, the struggle for supremacy between text and music found throughout the history of opera in its various reformations, including that spearheaded by Wagner, can be read as being oscillations from one gender to another. If early monody opera favoured text and was therefore a more masculine form, then high Baroque, in favouring music, was a more feminine one. Reformation opera again favoured drama, while the *bel canto* era signalled a return to music. These fluctuations result, not in a fixed dominant gender, but in a state of constant gender fluidity when we view opera, the art form, as a theoretical body existing across time. When a complete union of text and music is achieved in *Tristan und Isolde* it results in the blurring of gender distinction. Opera viewed in purely binary terms, therefore remains resistive to binary gender categorisation, a key function of queer theory.

The comparison of opera and the operatic to performative construction of gender and the positioning of opera as containing queer performance strategies and being read as a queerly gendered art form contributes to answering the main question of the research in two ways. Firstly it offers theoretical and philosophical conditions that influence the movement of opera singers, and therefore opera in this sense favours non-normative, camp, artificial, stylised and non-naturalistic forms of movement. Secondly it conflates the term 'camp' with the term 'operatic', which

then becomes the outward manifestation through which we may read opera as queer if we are inclined to do so. Sullivan's discussion of Alexander Doty's 'queer moments' concludes: "Queerness does not reside in the text, but rather is produced in and through the ever-changing relations between texts, readers and the world" (2003, p. 191). It is possible to read opera, and individual operas, as both queer and heteronormative, regardless of the presence of the operatic or not, but attempts to excise operaticness, when that is not necessary in order to read it in either way, may be viewed as a masculinist strategy for maintaining opera's heteronormative facade; a strategy for 'straightening-out' opera.

The operatic emerges

I have proposed that operaticness, (and therefore operatic movement) is an emergent property, and that this emergence may therefore be witnessed as a transformation at the intersection of disciplines. Within the narrative of the research this conclusion led me to focus my attention, when observing rehearsals, on the transformation in the discipline of movement with the introduction of the discipline of the music of the orchestra. The aim was to corroborate the theories I have discussed above through observation of that occurrence when isolating one discipline – movement – for scrutiny, as it intersects with other disciplines, most notably the music produced by the orchestra.

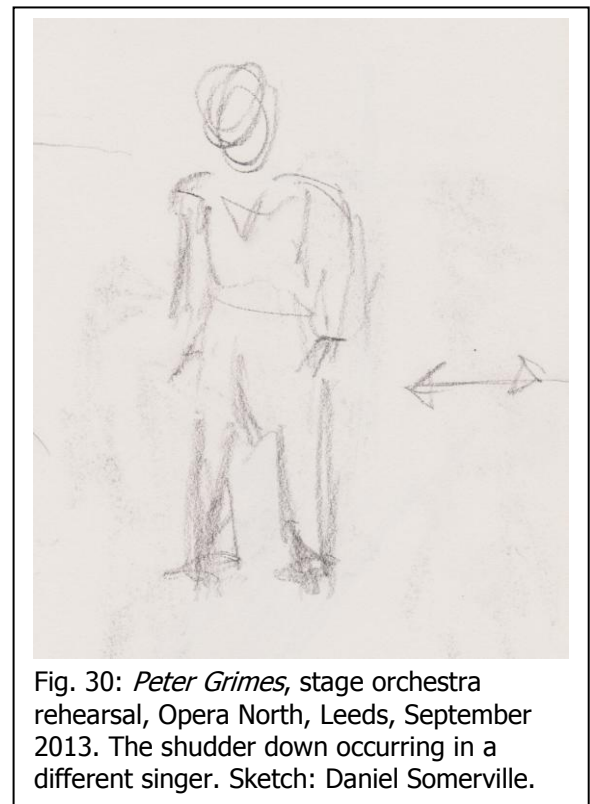
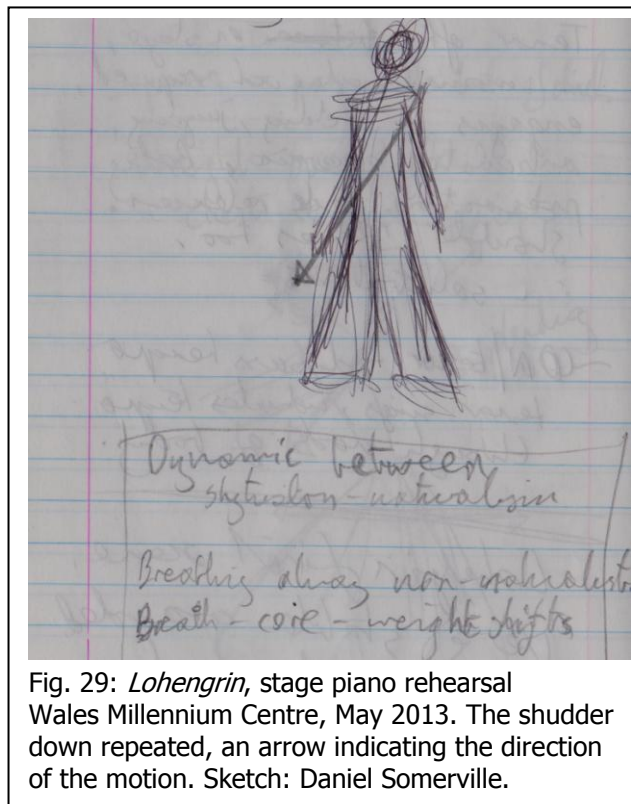
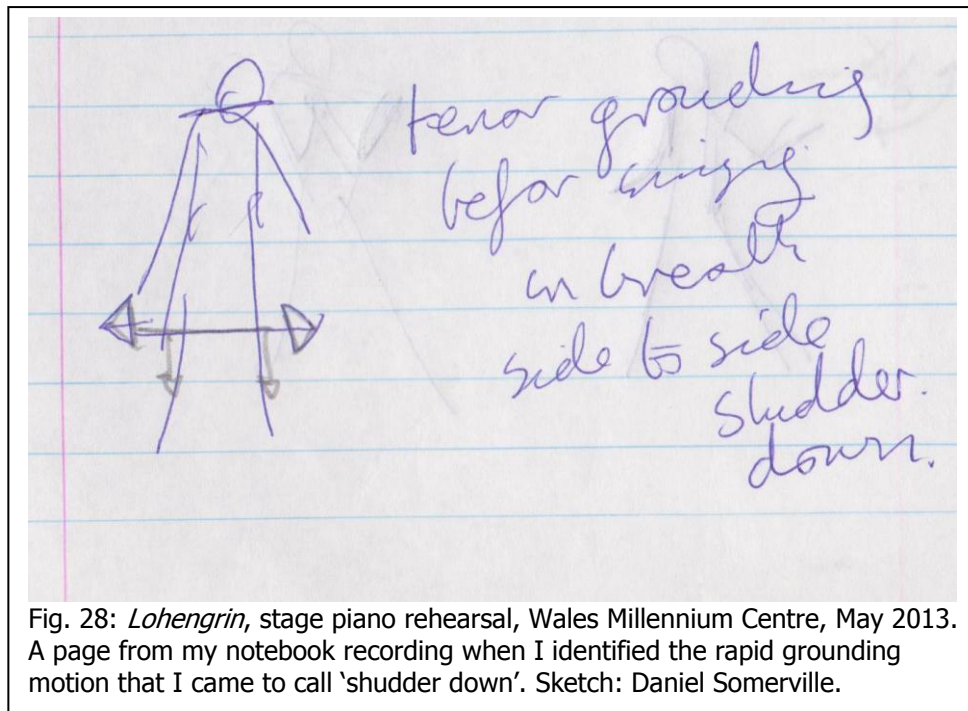
It should be noted that singers have different approaches to developing their physicality and characterisation and those observed were affected in different ways when rehearsals moved from piano stage rehearsals to orchestra stage rehearsals.

Through examining these processes and asking singers about their experiences I was able to identify what changes occurred due to practical considerations and which might signal the emergence of the operatic, or indeed how the former might also be regarded as an aspect of the latter.

The mezzo-soprano who played Ortrud in the Welsh National Opera³ production of *Lohengrin*, for example, marked the part in piano stage rehearsals and her movements and gestures were slow and deliberate. She hit certain points in the progression of the action that were dictated by the needs of the production as instructed by the director but all the movement in between these points was performed in flowing slow motion, which seemed to relate to operaticness, considering that I had already identified flow and fluidity as aspects of operatic movement, as discussed in the section on *French Collection* (see p. 96). This flowing slow motion seemed to be a preparation for what she expected her movement to be in performance. Once the orchestra stage rehearsals began and she began to 'sing out', the movement became less flowing however. The physical action of singing brought moments of tension to the body, activating and simultaneously interrupting the flow in the body. The tenor playing Lohengrin, who conversely sang out in almost all rehearsals, undertook movement, which was on the whole, quite minimal and internalised. There nonetheless erupted from time to time what I came to describe as the 'shudder down' – a sudden intake of breath accompanied by a shuddering (side to side in the torso and hip) grounding motion downwards [See Fig. 28, Fig. 29 & Fig. 30]. These examples forced me to reassess operaticness in

³ At the request of Welsh National Opera the names of artists participating in their productions are omitted and the designation of voice type or role name is used.

relation to flow and fluidity and to consider how sudden or jerky movements might also qualify as operatic under the criteria I had developed.



Only one singer, Faith Sherman, when asked, described gesture in opera in terms of “the arm following the line of the legato” (2013). This was, however, something which I frequently observed opera singers do in performance. This attachment of the flowing gesture to the musical phrase is something I regard as conforming to the criteria for the operatic and it influenced the fluid motions I had employed in my practice as exemplified in *Trio xxx* and *French Collection*. However, now what emerged were certain, sudden, jerky movements that nonetheless also fitted the criteria of what constituted operatic movement in that they were generated by the action of singing.

Operatic movement may therefore, I concluded, be both movements that are flowing, as well as movements that are sudden and abrupt. In either case there is a moderation of this movement that occurs in the bodies of singers that prevent these impulses from interrupting the perceived requirement for naturalism, while also maintaining the body so that the voice is not interrupted. Josephine Barstow, an advocate of “less is more” (2013) when it comes to gesture and movement in opera, spoke about her experiences on large stages.

When you get on stage with the orchestra, particularly in some of the repertoire, the orchestra is incredibly loud. And you find yourself on a vast stage in a vast auditorium. In Chicago, the stage is a city block away from the back of the auditorium. And suddenly you’re standing there and there’s this wall of sound in front of you and obviously you have to sing with enough power to get across that, to go over it. So you aren’t going to be waving your arms around in the air. (Barstow: 2013)

This containment of the body in virtual stillness so as to reserve the necessary energy for vocal production produces a shimmering body, which is at once

grounded, solid and powerful and yet constantly in action. In the duet between Ortrud and Elsa in *Lohengrin* I witnessed a moment when the singers, standing next to each other, began to move almost imperceptibly from side to side – not with the tempi of the music, and not in unison. I surmised that in resisting the urge to be moved by the music but being nonetheless energised by the action of singing and being musically tied together, there had arisen a conflict between the emergence of the operatic (the urge to move) and a second requirement to be still, which led to what I called 'shimmering statues' [See Fig. 31 & Fig. 32]. It was a state of almost stillness, a protracted moment of pre-expressivity, peppered with almost imperceptible, suppressed movements that resulted from the effort of singing and occurred most evidently when singers were engaged in duets where synchronised movement would have been undesirable, especially in the context of a realist production.

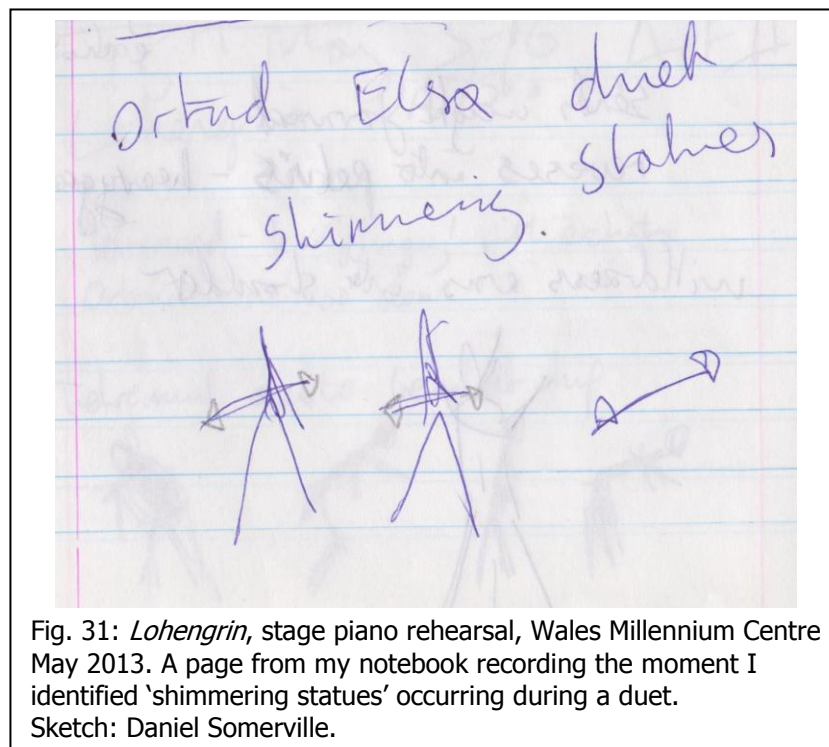




Fig. 32: *Peter Grimes*, stage orchestra rehearsal, Opera North, Leeds, September 2013. Shimmering statues repeated again in another duet with different singers. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

Shimmering statue states occur when singers resist the emergence of the operatic but may nonetheless be regarded as an example of operatic movement in themselves – occurring as they do through a physical negotiation during opera performance and resulting from being performed in opera. As an example of how the emergence of the operatic seems to occur involuntarily, Philip Rhodes (2013) expressed that he was often “baffled” by how his body could begin to want to move in quite stereotypically operatic ways (he gestured widely with his arms in rounded gestures as he spoke about this) even when he did not intend it to. He would, it

seems unconsciously respond to the music, and have to consciously temper his physical response. This resistance to “opera hands” as Catherine Goeldner (2013) had described the stereotypical waving about of arms ascribed to opera singers, creates a tension between the desire for naturalism in the form of a motionless body, and the impulse to be operatic as the music is embodied. Barstow, who was the most firm advocate of realism among all those I spoke to told me: “The thing is we try very hard not to be operatic. Operatic is not what we want, we want reality. I know we’re singing, I know it’s all enhanced reality, but what gets from there [the stage] to us in the auditorium, is truth” (2013).

This notion of ‘enhanced’ reality, or as I choose to call it, ‘operatic reality’ enables singers to reconcile the needs of vocal production with whatever the needs of the director and action are, whether stylised, choreographed or naturalistic and yet remain in a corporeal state (e.g. shimmering statue) that still qualifies as operatic. Realism itself, therefore, becomes subject to the transformative power of opera and the operatic transforms our (by which I mean both artist and audience) perception of what it takes to be real, authentic and truthful. The notion of truth and authenticity in performance was frequently emphasised by the singers that I interviewed but ‘operatic realism’ appeared to be able to bridge the divide between the needs of the singer to sing, and therefore also move unnaturally, but act ‘naturalistically’.

This crisis in the body of singers is very interesting to witness – the body conflicted, carried away and then controlled. It is a strategy I recognise from my own



Fig. 33: Daniel Somerville in *Butterfly Ghost*. A moment of internalised lyricism associated with choreography derived from Noh movement practice. Chisenhale Dance Space, April 2013. Photo: Jemima Yong.

performances where I deliberately allow the expressive open aspects of operatic movement and an outward gaze to conflict with and be juxtaposed by centred, internalised and minimal aspects of Butoh. *Butterfly Ghost* was an especially clear example of this as I oscillated between movement connected to the music and movement inspired by more formal choreography of Kabuki or Noh, alongside internalised Butoh lyricism, akin to Ohno's practice [See Fig. 33] and violent convulsion more recognisably influenced by Hijikata [See Fig. 27, p. 139].

The performance was also punctuated with moments where I think of myself as 'dropping out' of performance altogether and just 'being' with the audience or directing my gaze in a way that 'breaks' the performance, in much the same way as singers often have to when they look at the conductor for example. The issue of a performer needing to see the conductor during a performance is a feature of opera and creates small breaks in the flow of movement and the drama. Though I am not regarding these as aspects of operatic movement *per se*, these moments are an aspect of operatic performance and influence my approach to performance making, allowing for tiny distractions within the structure of my performances.

Elizabeth Llewellyn (2013), who sang Amelia in the English Touring Opera *Simon Boccanegra*, gave an account of the changes to her movement once the orchestra joins rehearsals that contrasts with those witnessed in *Lohengrin* and described above, but further enlightens the discussion on the role of the relation to the conductor. "It feels like what I am doing is slowing something down and simplifying what I am doing so that I can hear or so that I can see [the conductor]" (2013). This, she explained may be because a particular passage of music may be inaudible from the stage. As I had watched Llewellyn develop the character of Amelia in rehearsal she frequently and visibly tried out new actions and gestures. This process of constantly testing and trying, remaining unfixed throughout rehearsals, she told me, was intended to keep her open to realistic, 'in-the-moment' responses. Angela Gheorghiu in rehearsals of *La rondine* at the Royal Opera House made similar preparations and alterations to movement, blocking and gesture throughout stage piano rehearsals and into stage orchestra rehearsals despite the

fact that she had sung the role many times. Similarly to Llewellyn, Gheorghiu, despite a lot of experimentation in rehearsal, settled on wider, more fluid gestures that seemed attached to the music, once she was in performance.

The move to orchestra rehearsals caused some singers to add physical business and for others the orchestra slowed down and reduced their stage action. Some singers I witnessed during the research had a third approach where they fixed their blocking and gesture as early as possible in the rehearsal process making hardly any changes to their movement, even with the arrival of the orchestra. However, in most cases there were noticeable changes in the quality of movement with the addition of the orchestra, no matter what the process had been in rehearsal. For clarification on the role of the move to orchestra rehearsals, I asked singers when interviewing them if they mainly listened to the music or followed the conductor in performance (or when the orchestra was present in rehearsals). Six singers emphasised the need to do both, while seven said that they principally listened to the music and five said they mostly followed the conductor.

This demonstrated that while the music was sometimes overwhelmingly loud or was at times almost inaudible (requiring reference to the conductor) most of the singers interviewed listened to the music when they could. Knowing that most singers were listening to the music meant that I could surmise that the sound of the music emanating from the orchestra was a factor affecting changes to movement at this point in rehearsals and in performance. Those singers who fixed their movement early in rehearsal and did not change it with the arrival of the orchestra were also

among those who claimed that they did not listen to the music but followed the conductor. Therefore musical embodiment could account for the changes in movement among those who did appear to develop a sense of operaticness as an aspect of the transformation occurring with the arrival of the orchestra.

Goeldner pinpointed the moment of musical embodiment as being the intersection of all the disciplines, which begins to occur in the rehearsal process with the move to stage orchestra rehearsals, as I had hypothesised. "I would say it becomes one organic organism. The music, the text, the movement all informs the expression ... and the thought... that affects the gesture" (2013). Llewellyn also connected thought and physical gesture to gestures in the music. "It's not just about gestures, you know internally, it's about thoughts, or a thought process and what I observed in that particular Verdi score [*Simon Boccanegra*] was that your thought, it was really tight ... you had to have each thought, it was there in the music" (2013). Llewellyn also had the sensation of being physically moved by the music despite attempts to resist, implying a role for musical embodiment in the emergence of the operatic.

Even though I actually deliberately tried not to move or gesture at, or on, particular musical gestures in the orchestra, that's exactly what happened. I don't know, I guess it's a stroke of genius on the part of the composer that sometimes ... I didn't mean to turn my head on that particular chord but that's exactly what happens ... it's almost as if the gestures are written into the score. (Llewellyn: 2013)

Smart (2004) uses Verdi as an example of one of many Italian opera composers working in the early nineteenth century who did in fact intend to influence certain

physical gestures in the musical score. Additionally she describes how this tradition was replaced:

As the habit of synchronizing stage movement with music slowly went out of style after midcentury, the spectacle created by the visible body and the music that surrounded it altered fundamentally. Under this new aesthetic order, music might encircle the exhibited body, supplying a sensuous haze of sound to suggest erotic power; but its rhythms rarely traced or echoed the actual movements of a performer. (Smart: 2004, p. 4)

So while some opera music may be intended to bring on movements or gestures at certain times, other music (from the late nineteenth century onwards) provides a sensual envelope in which the body, encircled, may be moved or framed. I had observed, particularly in the production of *Simon Boccanegra*, that when rehearsals began with the orchestra many of the actions (of all singers) that had been developed in studio rehearsals became attached to figures in the music despite there being only very rare directorial instruction to do so.

Although Conway self-effacingly described himself at one stage as “Mr Anti-gesture” (19th February 2013) he did encourage a gesture “on the musical phrase” for the tenor in *Simon Boccanegra* at one point in studio rehearsal, anticipating where and how the orchestra would lead the arm in performance. This selective allowing of gesture attached to music was rare among the rehearsals I observed. On the whole directorial interventions concerned the reduction of gesture and the detachment of movement and gesture from the music.

Despite the efforts of directors to excise the operatic it appears that the powerful transformative effect of the intersection of creative disciplines, and in particular the effect of an orchestra on the body of the singer, is sometimes irresistible.

Susan Bickley described the arrival of the orchestra in rehearsal as akin to hearing music in film, adding: "It's such an imposition on one that you couldn't not follow it. Not much point in going against it. (Though sometimes one is asked to go against things that happen in the music.) ... If they [composers] are helping you colour a character by what they've offered then it completely influences what you do" (2013).

The move to stage orchestra rehearsal inevitably changes the way performers approach their movement on practical levels. Action that has been rehearsed in studio using a piano may alter because:

Sometimes the timings change a bit because orchestras don't have the same kind of aural decay⁴ that a piano has, so timing-wise things will be a little bit different. But also the character of something can change a bit when you hear the orchestration. You hear different colours. You hear different instruments. (McPherson: 2013)

There is also the fact that an orchestra creates a more tangible vibration than a piano. Emma Bell told me, "When you meet the orchestra for the first time you can't [resist it], it's unavoidable ... the stage is moving under you" (2013).

I concluded that singers, when encountering the orchestra, alter their movements for practical purposes such as seeing the conductor, or change the timing of a movement to accord with the aural decay of the orchestra. Their bodies are also subject to a physical vibration made by the orchestra, and musical gestures and tempi suggest timing for movements or gestures. There is also the issue of colour and texture in the music which relates to character, mood and atmosphere and this

⁴ The length of time it takes for a note to become inaudible after it is played. Percussive instruments such as a piano have short aural decay, while a string instrument such as a violin will have a longer one. The massed sound of an orchestra will collectively reverberate within the auditorium and will continue to be heard long after the note has been played.

also affects the quality of movement. Sylvia Clarke described this in terms of the nuance which the orchestra brought to rehearsed action.

You can feel the music go through you, you can feel the vibration, especially in the loud passages, which is quite a thrilling sensation... It comes to life, instead of just being a mechanical movement it can come to life and the orchestra contributes a great deal to that... little nuances appear that weren't in the [studio] rehearsal. (Clarke: 2013)

Bell characterised the arrival of the orchestra in rehearsals in terms other than sound and vibration however. "There's this silent energy, there's an energy ... a force" (2013).

The silent energy of the orchestra seemed to me to be a very interesting concept that related to my own experiences of how focussed embodiment, the body *moved* rather than *moving*, can feel. Two things can happen simultaneously, a feeling of being very highly attuned to the environment in which you are performing and a detachment from the concept of time and therefore from the music. I will often not consciously hear the music, not only because logistically, I am on stage and the sound is directed at the audience, but also because when music is embodied and time is distorted the movement response occurs without the conscious recognition of the sound. McPherson captured this experience when describing what it felt like to embody music.

There is something amazing when you can actually let the music just take you, where the quality or the attitude of the music, the tempo of the music all kind of works together with the physicality of your character and characterisation and it's almost like that stone-skipping place where it just bounces along with its own volition, it's just propelled forward. And there is something kind of transcendent about that. (McPherson: 2013)

Talking directly to singers about their experiences on stage, with an orchestra, integrated entirely into the moment of performance, revealed an immersion into the art form, a connectedness to the intersection of disciplines and artistic processes from which the operatic emerged in the body of the singer. If singers were finding that their movement was affected with the move to orchestra rehearsals and this occurrence went beyond the practical and rhythmic considerations then I would argue, given the emergent nature of the operatic I have hypothesised, that what was happening was the emergence of the operatic in the body of the singer and because it was emerging in the body, it was embodied, even if involuntarily.

When enquiring if singers allowed music to affect the way they moved and whether they felt that they thereby 'embodied' music when performing, all the respondents said that they did embody music. This, it should be remembered is despite the fact that only one had received any kind of training in what they regarded as embodiment. When asked directly if they could describe the experience of embodying music, the nature, as well as the content, of the responses was revealing. The answer was usually preceded by a prolonged silence accompanied by a euphoric expression or joyous smile. The answers, when they came, varied but were often given in the most esoteric and sometimes spiritual terms, accompanied by vivid imagery. Ross Scanlon described it as: "It's kind of like a wave, a wave of energy. I feel it like a heat or something that goes through my body. It comes from the soles of my feet, especially if I'm on stage and you feel that carpet of sound. It comes from the soles of my feet up my body like a surge, for me it's like a heat, a glow" (2013). Faith Sherman (2013) on the other hand felt the surge begin in her

core and extend outward. Jorge Navarro-Colorado appeared to agree: "It's like the orchestra is inside you ... It's a very abstract thing" (2013). The wave metaphor again featured in Rhodes' description of musical embodiment. "I think of it like a wave. The music is a wave that I am riding on top of with the emotion I am trying to play" (2013). Redgwick aligned the moment of operatic embodiment with a sense of being present and authentic. "I think you basically stop thinking about it ... its very exciting because you just suddenly; you're just in the moment" (2013). To be 'in the moment' and to be carried by the music, to feel the wave and the heat and energy is the embodiment of music, and clearly from these comments, it describes the emergence of the operatic as I had come to understand it.

Wedd furthermore described the moment of embodiment in a way that relates to my experience of embodiment in improvisation work I have undertaken to opera music in my creative processes. "I don't think there's only one answer for it. You know you could say, it could be like a mirror or ... sometimes it's a bit like therapy you know, in a way you can't quite, you know, it puts you on an internal voyage ... it's just, so many feelings and sensations ... it could be like a lifetimes worth of someone's experience all in one moment" (2013). Thoughts and sensations flood into the body creating movements and those movements in turn inspire thoughts and further images to respond to – it is precisely this process that draws autobiographical material into my practice.

Operatic movement without an orchestra

In this chapter I have argued that the operatic is an emergent property that occurs at the intersection of the disciplines mobilised in the performance of opera. I have used the example of the introduction of the orchestra to the rehearsal process to illustrate how this creative discipline – music played by the orchestra – transforms another creative discipline, the movement of the singing performer. There are however, other creative processes and disciplines that impact upon each other within opera performance. In centralising the role of the orchestra in my argument I do not mean to suggest that this is the only means by which operatic movement may occur or that operatic movement cannot occur without an orchestra. During the research I witnessed operatic movement during the mad scene in *Peter Grimes* for example, a scene which is unaccompanied by the orchestra. I would argue that the orchestra may be regarded as being present in this scene, through its intentional absence. However, the occurrence of operatic movement in the bodies of singers in song recitals (never intended to be accompanied by an orchestra) supports an argument that the artificiality associated with operaticness is activated by singing operatically while experiencing other intersections of creative inputs such as characterisation, lighting, costume, the presence of the audience and other factors occurring in performance. I witnessed, for example, operatic movement occurring in a recital of Mussorgsky songs (1875-1877) organised by Birmingham Opera Company at The Birmingham Cathedral on 21st March 2013. Anne-Marie Owens turned using her pelvis rather than through her centre, making tiny dips at the knee that kept the line from pelvic floor to larynx straight and arched the back of her neck to bend over an onstage cot in such a way as to keep the front of her neck relaxed.

All these were strategies for accomplishing movement while still maintaining the instrument, but her expressive arm gestures with open hands, served to carve out the line of the legato, even after the aural decay of the piano had passed. She was in effect, embodying the thought of an orchestra and extending the life of the sound through her actions. Movements such as heaving and bending diagonally across the cot even when not singing, extended the movement beyond what was necessary for vocal production and stylised the movement according my criteria for the operatic. In this example, other intersections become important to the emergence of the operatic in the body but also the artistry of the performer is emphasised – a performer able to bring on the emergence of the operatic without the assistance of the orchestra through, as I have characterised it, the queer strategy of artificiality found in the operatic. This demonstrated that it may be possible for operatic movement to be extracted from the performance of opera and utilised in the bodies of non-singing performers.

Practice Four: Mozart solo No. 1

{Ballet}

The fourth piece of practice is *Mozart solo No. 1* and the reader is now invited to view documentation of a performance on the accompanying DVD⁵ either now or after reading this section.

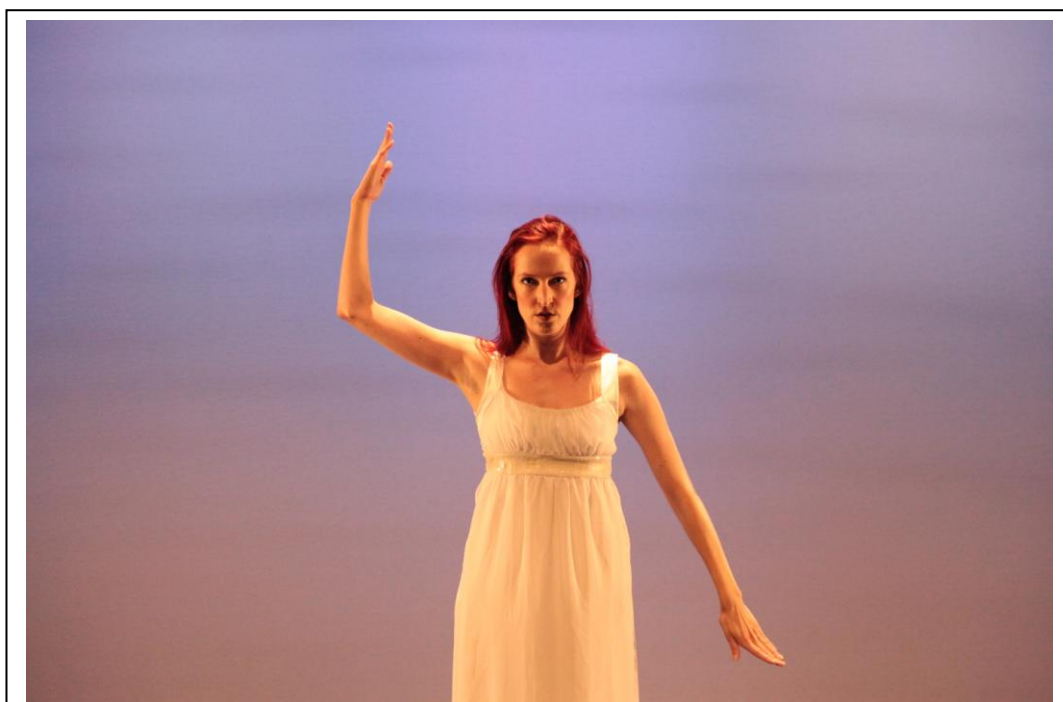


Fig. 34: Julia Fitzpatrick in *Mozart solo No. 1*. The dancer executes some angular arm shapes; first slowly, then more rapidly, and ultimately *en pointe*, as a metaphor for the feminine trope of the multi-tasker. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

Mozart solo No. 1 was a first attempt at choreographing a solo work for a person other than me. In this regard it marked a new focus in my practice which directly addressed the issue within the research of how the operatic, might be extracted from opera and be engendered in the body of a dancer.⁶ Working on this piece enabled me to explore ways in which as a choreographer I could begin to encourage the operatic to emerge and be embodied in bodies other than my own.

⁵ See DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Practice' – *Mozart solo No. 1* is on first page of the Works menu.

⁶ Chronologically this aspect of the research began in *Mozart solo No. 1* which was created prior to my workshops with Shauna and Charlotte discussed in Chapter Three and continued with them. However, the works that I made with Julia Fitzpatrick, which had begun in *Mad Scene* and which continued through the remaining examples of practice presented, provides a longer term case study to draw upon in observing the emergence of the operatic in her movement.

Similarly to *Butterfly Ghost*, *Mozart solo No. 1* was a work through which I engaged with and explored theory – in this case, feminist perspectives on the male construction of female characters. It has as its narrative a dancer who is disgruntled by the ways in which her body is forced into alternatively angular [See Fig. 34] and then soft flowing movements in an attempt to represent her femininity as it is imagined by an unseen male director or choreographer. The character that Julia dances, having mastered even the most virtuosic and demanding interpretations of a woman by a man, eventually ‘breaks free’ of the dance, and, having explored various aspects of womanliness through movement, she then runs around the stage, eventually raising her former veil as a flag of protest [See Fig. 35].



Fig. 35: Julia Fitzpatrick in *Mozart solo. No. 1*. The dancer holds a flag of protest and runs from the stage. November 2012, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton.
Photo: Jemima Yong.

The work is set to “Martern aller Arten” from Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (Sutherland: 1996) and draws on themes of incarceration and protest that are inherent in the opera’s narrative. Imprisonment is therefore partly represented as being the imprisonment of the male gaze and male ideas of feminine beauty, which the character seeks to escape. The work was devised through a collaborative process in which I asked Julia to respond to the music and themes of the text while developing movements that captured different aspects of her experience as a woman. In this way I sought to replicate my own autobiographical process of creation, but with me facilitating that process for another person. We then questioned which of the motifs that she had developed, were images of woman that were informed principally by the desires and fantasies of men, and which were her own images of womanliness. Throughout the work, stereotypes and archetypes emerge and disappear as the character sorts through these representations. In developing the narrative we were also navigating the real problems of authorship between a male choreographer and female dancer in creating a female character conscious of Sue Ellen Case’s critique of classical Greek drama and the female characters portrayed:

The feminist critic may no longer believe that the portrayal of women in classical plays by men relates to lives of actual women. Instead the feminist critic may assume that the images of women in these plays represent a fiction of women constructed by the patriarchy. (Case: 1985, p. 318)

Case highlights the fact that men constructed the women in Greek drama and therefore they cannot be regarded as real women, but rather as fantasies of men that are informed only by the experience of women by men and not by the experiences of women themselves. As a male author I sought to navigate this problem through a collaborative process that gave the performer the principal voice

in the matters of female representation. *Mozart solo No. 1* interrogates the binary notion of gender and attempts to disrupt binarism through the rebellious narrative and through this non-hierarchical process of collaborative creation. The work also addresses other aspects arising from the research, such as the need to pay attention to the aural decay of the orchestra and to the phrasing and emotional quality of the voice, which were, in this case, encountered in the recording that accompanied the work. In two moments, the first when Julia takes centre stage just prior to the start of the sung text and again later when she, again centre stage, poses and looks at her hands, I focussed on trying to engender operaticness as a discrete mode of performance alongside the angular, the balletic, the erotic and the grounded moves from elsewhere in the work. In the first moment we discovered that it was a notion of pre-expressivity that helped to invoke the operatic – the sense of waiting, 'as if' to sing, but then as the voice starts in the recording, the body collapses to the floor. This isolated the bodily preparations for singing and embodied a sense of the hanging, waiting body, a body in anticipation. The second moment relied more on the use of opera-fu, especially 'stick in palm' [See Fig. 24] discussed in Chapter Three.

In observing Julia adjusting her weight from one side to another I realised that her instinct as a trained dancer was to be symmetrical in her movement, which highlighted a difference in the ways in which I had observed singers shift weight and move hands. In the version of this movement employed in opera there was an asymmetrical emphasis, one hand moving slightly faster and further up and out, with the other, as if forgotten, drifting more slowly and without intention down and

behind [See Fig. 36]. Though the hands draw apart in an oppositional manner, they do not do so at the same speed or with the same force. Working on this solo revealed this nuance of operatic movement. In terms of transferring the operatic to a body other than my own it was through a process of combining opera-fu with acute observations such as this, that I was able, as choreographer, to then refine.

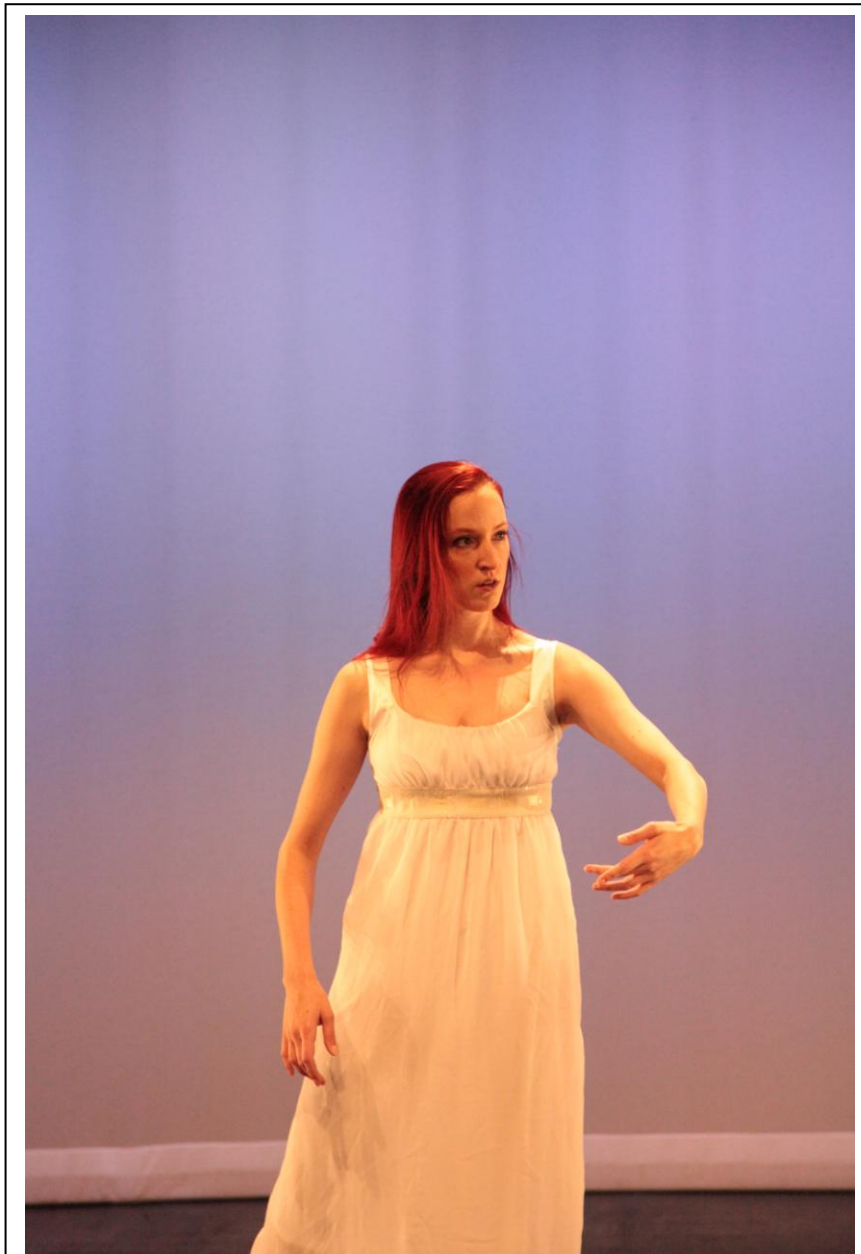


Fig. 36: Julia Fitzpatrick in *Mozart solo. No. 1*. Using opera-fu, such as the candy-floss machine and stick in palm, combined with an understanding of the operatic body held so as to preserve the instrument, the dancer draws her hands apart asymmetrically. November 2012 The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

Practice Five: The Canterbury Masque

{*Knee-play*}

The fifth example of practice is *The Canterbury Masque* and the reader is invited to view documentation of the performance on the accompanying DVD⁷ either now or at the close of this section.



Fig. 37: Daniel Somerville and company in rehearsal for *The Canterbury Masque*. This moment is a reference to the architectural transformation aspect of masque performance and creates an image that represents Canterbury Cathedral.
January 2013, Coyer-Ferguson Hall, University of Kent. Photo: Jemima Yong.

The Canterbury Masque represented a return in my practice to spoken text. Although work prior to the research period, such as *My Egypt Stories* had employed spoken text, which concerned stories from my lived experience, the work I had thus far undertaken as part of the research had engaged only with the physical aspects of operatic movement. What became increasingly clear when talking with singers was the huge influence that character, narrative and language had on their approaches

⁷ See DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Practice' – *The Canterbury Masque* is on first page of the Works menu.

to movement. This was an aspect which I had mistakenly underestimated and in attempting to isolate operatic movement I had in fact neglected one of the vital intersections which facilitate its emergence.

The Canterbury Masque was a commission from the Accidental Collective and was performed as the inaugural event of the Coyler-Ferguson Concert Hall at the University of Kent in January 2013. I was asked to respond to the space of the hall and in approaching the commission I considered Wagner's *The Artwork of the Future*. "Architecture can have no higher aim than to provide the space for a fraternity of artists to portray themselves so that the human artwork may be aired" (Wagner: 1849, p. 72). Wagner also describes the artist of the future in terms that resonate with contemporary collaborative performance practices:

Who then will be the artist of the future?
Without doubt the poet.
But who will be the poet?
Indisputably the performer.
But again: who will be the performer?
Necessarily the community of all artists.
(Wagner: 1849, p. 78)

Accordingly I continued to work collaboratively with a community of artists that included Julia Fitzpatrick. We each contributed to the overall vision for the work that followed my encounter with the hall. In responding to the hall I found that my own strong connections to the city of Canterbury could not be ignored. I was born and educated in Canterbury and my mother still lives in the city. Canterbury is the centre of the Anglican Church and debates were occurring, as I prepared the work, about women bishops, as well as gay marriage. The Coyler-Ferguson Trust who had

funded the hall, are also very active in the restoration of local churches. Three themes emerged strongly: music, religion and my own experience of Canterbury as the city in which I had come out as gay in the 1980s at a time of homophobic legislation and discourse around Clause 28.

I began by researching the countertenor Alfred Deller, who had lived in the city during World War II. He was a devout man and a heterosexual but his high singing voice had set him apart and though it ultimately brought him world fame and respect, I identified strongly with the sense of difference he had felt as a result of his voice type (Hardwick: 1968). *The Canterbury Masque* features a narrator, a dance of the masquers and an architectural display; it is broadly flattering to its patron, contains music, dance, song and spoken text and includes some commentary on current politics. All these are traditional features of a masque, a form that allows for fragmentation, parody and multi-media also commonly used in postmodern performance. Alongside Deller, other characters appear in the masque: Boy George, Jesus, Margaret Thatcher, a host of female bishops, Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, Oberon and Titania, as well a representation of myself as a youth, played by my son.

The masque features a duet for Julia Fitzpatrick and me, set to a recording of Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, (Britten: 1990) in which Deller sings the role of Oberon which was written for him by Britten. In this duet we experimented with operatic attitudes, moving respectively as the voices of Oberon and Titania were heard. The process of developing this scene, which involved me dressed as Deller,

dressed as Oberon, [See Fig. 38] Julia dressed as Margaret Thatcher but playing both Lady Macbeth and Titania, involved conversations about how the many lines of narrative were intersecting in this scene and why.



Fig. 38: Daniel Somerville (as Alfred Deller playing Oberon) in *The Canterbury Masque*. I gesture towards Titania/Thatcher using 'headlamps' as the voice of Deller is heard in the recording. January 2013, Coyer-Ferguson Hall, University of Kent. Photo: Jemima Yong.

In explaining the complex layering of narratives, what became clear in terms of process was that anecdote, both personal and in regards to the lore surrounding opera, played an important part in bringing out a sense of the operatic in the performance and in our movements. Through this experience I began to question why my position as opera queen had not featured more prominently in my performance making process during the research. Had I somehow devalued the contribution it could make to the engendering of the operatic? Had I, in some ways, taken the operatic too seriously and thereby stripped it of immediacy and joy?

The free exchange of ideas and dramaturgy of anecdote and hearsay in *The Canterbury Masque* transformed the movement I was witnessing in the deliberately operatic scenes (there were other scenes intended to be more like a formal dance) into something less like a dancer or actor and more like the artificiality of the opera singer, without resorting to stock poses and stereotypes. The movement was informed by the use of anecdote that went beyond the narrative of both the masque and the original material and engaged with personal perspectives and histories.

I further tested the idea that knowledge and context could inform the ability to move operatically through the *Lohengrin* workshops. Using the knowledge and techniques I had developed for recreating the physical appearance of operatic movement I facilitated a workshop that I delivered to two sample groups, one group that had prior knowledge of Wagner and his operas and one group that did not. The outcome indicated that knowledge and the power of anecdote could influence the quality and style of the movement generated in the workshop, with the knowledgeable group engaging more with the material and creating expressive movements that were attached more readily to the ebb and flow of the music.⁸ The knowledgeable group appeared to be more open to unconventional physical expressions proposed by Wagner:

Thus, gestures of quite special peculiarity require to be invented for the drama; the action of which, as well as all its motives, is elevated and enobled above ordinary life – and to a pitch bordering on the marvellous.
(Wagner: 1851, p. 574)

⁸ See accompanying DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Former Practice and Research Workshops and Projects' for a short video showing excerpts from the *Lohengrin* workshop delivered at the 'Wagner's Impact on His World and Ours' conference.

Contortions of the body and the interplay of different dance forms in *The Canterbury Masque* are just two examples of working towards “gestures of quite special peculiarity” [See Fig. 39], which I equate with the artificiality of the operatic.



Fig. 39: Julia Fitzpatrick and company members in *The Canterbury Masque*. In this scene a host of female bishops dance to *Music* by Madonna. The burlesque informed choreography includes motifs for the hands which, also used elsewhere in the work, inspire contorted forms. January 2013, Coyer-Ferguson Hall, University of Kent. Photo: Jemima Yong.

Chapter Five: Empathy

{Act IV}

In this chapter I summarise my research thus far and propose a means via which operatic movement is understood and executed by singers despite the fact that it does not feature as a part of their formal training. I will also discuss how, using this information, I was able to devise ways in which to invoke operaticness in non-singers through recognition of the insights and perspective of the opera queen.

My research indicates that singers are not routinely trained in embodiment and nor do they receive training in how to be operatic. However, opera singers do report that they regularly experience what I have identified as the embodiment of the operatic as it emerges in the body during performances and rehearsals when the disciplines that go towards making up an opera begin to intersect. There remains however no explanation within this formulation of an emergent operatic, as to how the operatic can emerge in different bodies, in such a way as is, if not uniform, at least consistently recognisable. There must also therefore be a way of communicating the operatic between bodies and I propose that kinaesthetic empathy offers an explanation for that process.

“Broadly speaking ‘kinesthesia’ can be understood to refer to sensations of movement and position” (Reason & Reynolds: 2012, p. 18), while empathy is the English translation of the word *Einfühlung* which means “projecting oneself into the object of contemplation” (Reason & Reynolds: 2012, p. 19). Together with scientific research into mirror neurons which “unify action production and action observation”

(Rizzolatti & Sinigaglia in Reason & Reynolds: 2012, p. 19) these definitions provide a way of understanding how a singer might observe the actions of another singer and through an “embodied simulation” (Reason & Reynolds: 2012, p. 19) share what is observed. Over time a recognisably operatic type of movement could therefore have developed and been passed down through generations of singers each of whom would have observed the embodiment of the operatic in other, more experienced singers.

There are, as I have described, aspects of the movement of singers that are brought about through attention to the maintenance of the instrument and through the physical effort of sudden in-breath and controlled exhalation. Expression in the arms, hands and head is often increased to compensate for the restrictions placed on the torso. Also, the angles of the torso and an asymmetrical and oppositional movement with deferred completion add to what can be achieved in terms of expression. Walking and running may be interrupted with stops and are usually undertaken lightly, often on the balls of feet, so as to prevent jogs and bumps that might interrupt vocal production. All these practical concerns are negotiated alongside required actions given by the director, the need to act in character and convey authentic emotions and narrative while always being aware of the conductor and the music. Within all this there emerge fleeting moments of being carried, transformed and of being subject to the emergence of the operatic as an involuntary embodiment. When this occurs during an aria, which we may in most cases regard as a frozen moment in time in terms of the narrative of the opera, the singer has the greatest agency over the stage action. At this point the operatic is much more than

simply considerations of the bodily needs of vocal production or the need to convey plot or character. In these moments, in a Brechtian turn, the audience can experience a detachment from the narrative flow of the opera and appreciate for a moment the skills of the singer. Thereby their knowledge of the life, reputation, career and recordings of the singer may be drawn into the frame of the performance. The performed and performer exist in one moment simultaneously bound together and binding together the events on stage. Here that elusive operatic sensibility which is neither taught nor learned reveals itself through the movement of the singer and so the 'operatic moment' occurs (see Introduction).

Movement, when observed, has the capacity, to be shared with others, activating internal bodily and neural responses that bring forth an understanding of the action observed. I am not speaking therefore of singers copying the movements of other singers but of a process whereby in seeing operatic movement, they have already experienced it through the embodied simulation inherent in kinaesthetic empathy and can therefore recognise the necessary corporeal responses when the time comes and they feel the onset of operatic embodiment.

I propose that in this way, without training or formal pedagogy, operaticness of movement is passed from one singer to another and from one generation to another. Another aspect contributing to this position is that I observed during the research period actions and movements that appeared to adhere to, or be remnants or residues of, former codifications of opera movement, such as those found in Shea (1915). Having asked the singers directly, I was aware that these had not been an

aspect of their training. Operatic ways of negotiating the demands of the opera stage may have been passed from singer to singer through the experience of kinaesthetic empathy over time, a reiteration of the notion of sedimentary processes of 'becoming' at work in the construction of opera as a category, and as individual operas, and now evident in the construction and communication of the operatic in terms of movement.

Still images

It is not only through the witnessing of singers moving 'operatically' in live performance that a kinaesthetic response capable of transferring the operatic might occur. "[T]he same regions of the brain involved in processing the watching of actual movement are engaged when processing motion that is only implied in a still image" (Reason: 2012, p. 247). Reason's discussion of Chris Nash's photographs and the kinaesthetic information they contain is understood as a condition under which kinaesthetic empathy might occur, meaning that still images can contribute to the transfer of information about movement between singers.

Donald Keene (2009) makes a comparison between Haiku poetry, analogous with *Butoh-fu*, and photographic stills by Eikoh Hosoe of Hijikata performing Butoh. "The haiku poet attempts to capture, with the most economical means, a particular instant; this is also true of the photographer ... both arts that reduce a creative experience to an evocative moment" (Keene: 2009, unpaginated). The delicate interplay between still image and live performance was a feature of my research in two ways. Firstly, when observing opera singers in rehearsal I took notes and made

sketches of the attitudes, positions and flow of movement. I aimed to capture 'an evocative moment', thinking less about a realistic representation of the action and more about capturing the flow of movement and relation of different parts of the body of the performer. I was also responding in the moment of sketch making to the presence of the orchestra and simultaneously becoming subject to a kinaesthetic exchange from subject to researcher. The sketches function not only as records of body shape and flow of movement but they also record my own kinaesthetic response in that moment.

The second way in which I used still images in the research was through my collaboration with performance photographer Jemima Yong. She photographs my rehearsals and acts as a visual dramaturge in my creative process. Through creating moments in performance that relate to the revisiting of visual images captured by Yong, I am able to place 'markers' in the choreography to frame moments within what may be otherwise improvisatory sequences. Yong also documented the performances that were undertaken during the research period, recapturing the markers she had assisted in embedding.¹

The following comparisons of sketches to photographs (pp. 168-170) are an illustration of how kinaesthetic empathy may have occurred during the research.

Consideration should be taken that in these examples I was not working directly

¹ Yong's stills of my performances (Fig. 1, Fig. 10, and Fig. 27) were exhibited as visual artworks (*Recherché*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery: 21st September to 5th October 2013). Authorship for the image is shared however between subject (me) and photographer (Yong) and the photographs were exhibited as collaboration. This principle of shared authorship of the performance photograph is derived from Manuel Vason's groundbreaking approach to Live Art photography in *Exposures* (Vason, Keidon & Athey: 2002) and evident on the website ArtCollaboration.co.uk [Accessed 19.11.2013].

from the sketches in order to recreate forms. I have matched photographs to sketches retrospectively to show how certain ways of moving that occurred in the practice had been observed in the field studies and were seemingly acquired through embodied simulation. These comparisons therefore indicate how I believe I had acquired operatic movement through a process of kinaesthetic empathy, one that mimics the way in which singers acquire the operatic. As examples: the raising of the arm and moving away of the head, prior to collapsing [See Fig. 40 & Fig. 41];



Fig. 40: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*, November 2013 The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.



Fig. 41: *Tosca*, orchestra stage rehearsal, Royal Opera House July 2013. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

a movement of the body through the pelvis and an arching of the back to create a sense of moving forward when stationary [See Fig. 42 & Fig. 43]; or a slight turning of the back and shoulders to appear to collapse the chest and a slight turning of the head to the audience in order to remain audible, thus the body appears to withdraw upstage [See Fig. 44 & Fig. 45].



Fig. 42: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*, November 2013
The Performance Hub, University of
Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.



Fig. 43: *Tosca*, orchestra stage rehearsal,
Royal Opera House, July 2013.
Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

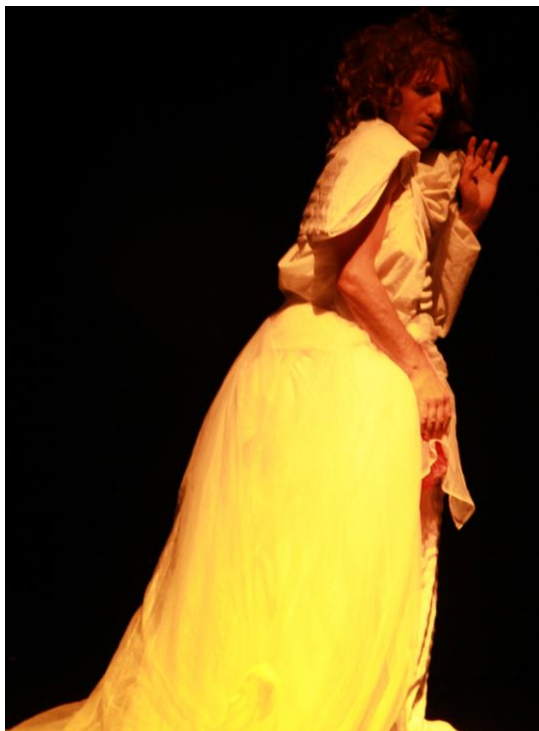


Fig. 44: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*, November 2013
The Performance Hub, University of
Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.



Fig. 45: *Tosca*, orchestra stage rehearsal,
Royal Opera House, July 2013.
Sketch: Daniel Somerville.



Fig. 46: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*, November 2013 The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.



Fig. 47: *La rondine*, orchestra stage rehearsal, Royal Opera House, July 2013. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.



Fig. 48: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*, November 2013 The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.



Fig. 49: *Anna Bolena*, stage piano rehearsal, Wales Millennium Centre, August 2013. Sketch: Daniel Somerville.

Additionally these images show a flow of movement through the knee, with arm extended behind, [See Fig. 46 & Fig. 47] and the upstage shoulder propelling the arm forward as the head rolls back [See Fig. 48 & Fig. 49].

Opera queening

I have proposed that the mechanism for an opera singer to acquire an understanding of the nuances and stylisation of operatic movement even prior to experiencing it directly in performance, is kinaesthetic empathy, whether through witnessing such movement live or through still images. This I propose is how singers are enabled to embody operatic movement when the operatic emerges involuntarily at the convergence of disciplines that occurs in later rehearsals and in performances.

Koestenbaum comments on queer embodiment when listening to an adored diva's voice (1993: p. 42). His description is reminiscent of the notion of kinaesthetic response, or empathy, as he continues:

The listener's inner body is illuminated, opened up: a singer doesn't expose her throat, she exposes the listener's interior. Her voice enters me, makes me a "me", an interior, by virtue of the fact I have been entered. The singer ... discredits the fiction that bodies are separate, bounded packages.
(Koestenbaum: 1993, p. 43)

In his descriptions of listening and watching divas perform and in his many comments on images of singers, Koestenbaum presents the opera queen as experiencing two phenomenon that I have proposed as occurring in the body of the singer. Firstly, that the operatic is embodied in the body of the opera queen and emerges when listening to opera. Secondly his descriptions evoke the notion of kinaesthetic empathy – the opera queen moved internally by the sight and sound of the diva. Two functions that I have proposed as mechanisms for embodying and engendering operatic movement happen for opera queens as they do for opera singers. There is the perspective of the opera queen, which has insight into, and an

understanding of, the queerness of opera and which allows access to the experience of the singer as a non-singer. The recognition of the value of the perspective of the opera queen – the ability to experience kinaesthetic empathy in the same way as singers do and the ability to perceive beyond the immediate narrative and to embody operaticness through the same means as the singer – places the opera queen, or rather what might be termed 'opera queening' as the missing component in my aim to invoke operaticness in the body of a non-singer.

Move like a diva

To test this notion I undertook two experiments. The first was an evening spent with Julia Fitzpatrick listening to a recording of *Tosca*. As the recording played I issued forth with every anecdote, fact, rumour, imagining or impulse that came to mind. I moved about the room and encouraged her to do the same. We drank wine. Where we had always taken listening to music in studio very seriously and had applied ourselves to generating movement through focussed listening and attempts at embodiment, now the process, free of the strictures of studio and deadline, was disruptive, impulsive, care-free, rapid and camp. We imitated, indulged, spoke over each other and the recording, went back, repeated sections embellishing our feelings, sighing and swooning. Through this process I was able to transfer into her body, not the operatic that I tacitly understood as embodied in me, but the sensibility of the opera queen – the mechanism through which she might access the operatic for herself. While I could not successfully transfer operaticness through opera-fu and corporeal awareness of the demands of singing and needs of the vocal instrument alone, the final ingredient, accessed by singers but not by

dancers, could be accessed by opera queens. I did not need to create choreography to enable people to be operatic – I needed to teach non-singing performers how to appreciate opera like an opera queen.

To test this notion, my second experiment was to conduct a workshop entitled 'Move Like a Diva'. Participants were introduced to the *hokotai* and simple embodiment exercises as usual. I also introduced the opera-fu and discussed the body of the singer as an instrument that required a particular corporality. Where this workshop differed from previous workshops was in the free-flowing, camp, articulation of my identity as opera queen. I enthused about operas and their plots and the anecdotes both private and public connected to the music and I included the following Oscar Wilde quote as an example of how they might allow the music to inspire their own associations and recollections.

Sometimes when I listen to the overture to *Tannhäuser*, I seem indeed to see the comely knight treading delicately on the flower strewn grass, and to hear the voice of Venus calling to him from the caverned hill. But at other times it speaks to one of a thousand different things, of myself it may be, and my own life, or of the lives of others whom one has loved and grown weary of loving, or of the passions that man has known, or of the passions that man has not known, and so has sought for. (Wilde: 1913, pp.144-5)

The participants were at first inhibited, but my new approach to delivery relaxed them and as we moved, improvising and evoking associations to the music I witnessed the operatic emerge, fleetingly and occasionally. I knew that operatic movement could occur in the non-singing body, because it occurred in my own. However, even the most detailed descriptions of the movement, along with embodiment exercises intended to bring on operaticness were not enough without the empathy of the opera queen in order to allow the operatic to emerge.

Practice Six: Mozart Movement Study

{Interlude}

The sixth piece of practice is *Mozart Movement Study* and the reader is invited to view documentation of a performance on the accompanying DVD² either now, at the close of this section, or along with the final piece, *Admiring La Stupenda* because although it was conceived as a discrete work, it eventually became a part of the dramaturgy of *Admiring La Stupenda*, acting as a prologue. *Mozart Movement Study* continued my work with Julia Fitzpatrick, and completes our journey together from *Mad Scene*, through *Mozart solo No. 1* and *The Canterbury Masque*. She appears in the work as a character that is intended as both the diva and an idealised but inaccessible mother figure [See Fig. 50].



Fig. 50: Julia Fitzpatrick and Daniel Somerville in *Mozart Movement Study*. Maternal gestures that stop short of touch, perhaps indicating distance and inaccessibility. November 2013, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

² See DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Practice' – *Mozart Movement Study* is on first page of the Works menu.

Mozart Movement Study was created after the 'opera queening' experiment with *Tosca*. It shows how Julia's movement, which in *Mozart solo No. 1* was informed principally by her training in dance, has been transformed into a body that incorporates all the nuances of the operatic, through application of opera-fu, knowledge of the singing body and a sensitivity acquired through empathy with the opera queen. She commands the stage and shimmers with inner tension and operatic suspension. The piece opens with Julia centre stage and consists of me crossing slowly to join her, seeking some interaction and ultimately being left only with her outsized diva's shawl. The narrative concerns the ungraspable, unattainable nature of the admiration of fan for diva as exemplified by Koestenbaum (1993). This is overlaid with a second narrative concerning my mother, detached and anxious in old age, which is explored further in *Admiring La Stupenda*.

The piece is set to music from Mozart's *Così fan tutte* which is a popular and frequently performed work, despite the blatant misogyny of its narrative. As such it is a continuation of the exploration of the intersection of feminist theory in my practice and research, explored initially in *Mozart solo No. 1*. *Così fan tutte* may be viewed ultimately as a critique of misogyny. David Nice (2012) explains, through his musical analysis in the programme notes of the Royal Opera production directed by Jonathan Miller, that Mozart had a strong sense of empathy for the female characters. The music of the women is more textured, more three dimensional, than that of the male characters. The opera becomes a critique of men, a demonstration perhaps, of opera's hidden subversive potential directed at the heart of the establishment.

I have undertaken my research and practice with awareness throughout of the intersection that it has with feminist perspectives and in particular Clément's *Opera: the undoing of Women* (1988), which can be regarded as a product of French feminism more associated with essentialist strands of feminist critique and which was written at a distinctly pre-queer moment in history. This has highlighted the danger that queer perspectives may be at odds with essentialist feminist critique as I navigate the desire to be both queer, escaping gender altogether, and non-sexist, requiring the admission of gender differentiation. The essentialist feminist perspective she offers is problematic in queer terms for its failure to challenge binarism and when read 'as a gay man', it ventures uncomfortably into homophobia on occasions. Clément's description of the men she criticises begins to adhere to Koestenbaum's (1993) description of the opera queen as 'fact police'.

He is a good opera lover... he does not know music... But this man loves opera. He invests all his passions in it... he possesses all for himself, an immense knowledge about opera recordings... records are like books, true or false, that haunt the long corridors where day by day he classifies. (Clément: 1988, p. 16)

Similarly in discussing the death of Maria Callas, Clément is even more explicit, calling for the men to: "Leave this woman alone, whose job it was to wear gracefully your repressed homosexual fantasies" (1988, p. 28). A queer reading of Clément, an opera queen's reading, is a disturbingly homophobic one. Ultimately her attack on opera becomes an attack on homosexuality as the misogynist mechanism of vindictive male hatred of women that results in an adoration of their demise. In arguing thusly Clément offers a groundbreaking feminist reading of opera and those operas with which she chooses to illustrate her argument, but fails to escape or confront the binary system that made opera so offensive in the first place, and which in fact forces homosexuality to the periphery as well as women into

subordination. Furthermore she uses that paradigm to position black men (*Otello*),³ the disabled (*Rigoletto*) and the wounded (*Parsifal* and *Tristan*) as “not real men” (Clément: 1988, p. 119), subject therefore to the same ‘undoing’ that befalls women in opera. Clément situates all that is not white, able-bodied and male as ‘other’, but in a queer reading implicates homosexuality rather than heterosexism. Only in her analysis of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* which recognises both the possible bisexuality of the protagonist and his hysteria, does she present a challenge to patriarchal hegemony that employs queer strategies. “Don Giovanni escapes from his original sex... The prima donna, costumed as woman is not a woman, Don Giovanni, decked in masculine effects, is not a man... the opposition slips away... passing endlessly from one to the other” (Clément: 1988, p. 36). Recognising his hysteria becomes the means via which Clément overcomes her perception of Don Giovanni as a rapist, allowing a reinterpreted viewing where he is deserving of the sympathy and attention he attracts from the female characters. Genders in this analysis become indistinguishable. Here Clément engages with the premises of queer theory and reveals an alternative reading precisely through the dismantling of binarism that she elsewhere maintains. I am mindful therefore that essentialist feminist readings and poststructuralist queer readings are not always compatible or complementary. This position affects the way in which I approach the representation of women in my practice either through cross-dressing – which I will address further when discussing *Admiring La Stupenda* (p. 178) – or through female characters for female performers nonetheless mediated by a male choreographer as explored in *Mozart solo No. 1*.

³ I use the Italian spelling for this character as that is how it appears in the opera *Otello* (Verdi: 1887)

Practice Seven: Admiring La Stupenda

{*Divertimento*}

The last piece of practice presented is *Admiring La Stupenda* and the reader is invited to view documentation of a performance on the accompanying DVD⁴ now or at the close of this section.

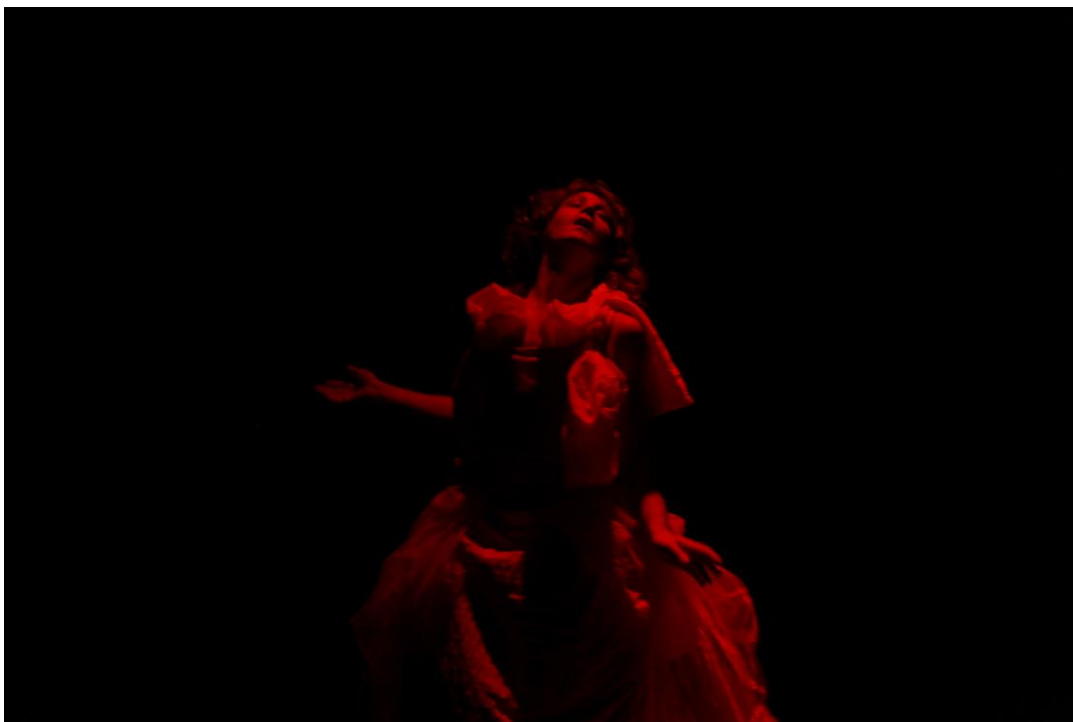


Fig. 51: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*. Embodying the memory of Joan Sutherland as Lucia as well as referencing images of her in the role. November 2013, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

The title is a direct reference to Kazuo Ohno's performance *Admiring L'Argentina* described by Baird (2011). Ohno combined memories of seeing the flamenco dancer L'Argentina, with thoughts and memories of his mother, building in other narratives besides. Memory, truth, nostalgia and the convergence and embodiment of these narrative strands underpin the work, one of the best known of all Butoh performances. Similarly, *Admiring La Stupenda* is a work constructed using my

⁴ See DVD 'Daniel Somerville: Practice' – *Admiring La Stupenda* is on the second page of the Works menu.

memories of seeing 'La Stupenda' perform, combined with reflections on and memories of my mother.

In this regard it is the most autobiographical of the practice presented and concerns events coinciding with the research. Throughout the research period my mother's health was declining and my responsibility towards her care increased, leading me to confront the real possibility that she may one day need my full-time care and may need to live with me. As the process of the research affirmed my adoption of the opera queen identity, it seemed that the negative stereotype of an older gay man living with his mother (perhaps associated with the opera queen) also loomed large and inevitably entered the frame and narrative of the performance.

Having appreciated the value of the opera queen's perspective in my creative processes, I aimed to create a work true to that realisation which might also showcase some of the findings of the research in terms of theory and through demonstrating operatic movement and the embodiment of the operatic in the body of the opera queen on stage. I returned to Koestenbaum to begin my process:

The opera queen must choose one diva. The other divas may be admired, enjoyed, even loved. But only one diva can reign in the opera queen's heart; only one diva can have the power to describe the listener's life, as a compass describes a circle. (Koestenbaum: 1993, p. 19)

My chosen diva, my badge of opera queen honour, the describer of my life, was Joan Sutherland, known as 'La Stupenda.' I have seen Sutherland perform and used my memories of those performances, rich with legend, anecdote and a sense of historic occasion. I also researched Sutherland's movement through watching video

recording and through viewing images of her in the roles that I wanted to portray.⁵ In this way I engaged with the processes of kinaesthetic empathy described in Chapter Five by stimulating my memories of seeing Sutherland and by seeking an embodied simulation of her movement via the still and moving images. I included spoken text in the work, structuring the narrative around my own experience of seeing Sutherland rather than relating her biography alone. In this way the personal remained in the foreground and the slippages into other personal reflections were seamlessly integrated.

The work again uses the queer strategy of cross-dressing. In *Trio xxx*, *French Collection* and *Butterfly Ghost*, I cross-dress not as an attempt to imitate women (though I do use it to explore suffering Clément's 'undoing' of women) but as a way to firstly highlight gender play so often encountered in opera and to challenge binary notions of gender generally, while also demonstrating the act of an opera queen trying to inhabit the space and body of the singer. Cross-dressing in *Admiring La Stupenda* is undertaken differently, on stage in full view of the audience. This is done with two divergent aims: to highlight gender as imitative (Butler: 2006) and therefore performative, and yet to expose the act of cross-dressing in the performance, as a performance.

In *Bodies That Matter* (2011) Butler refines her statements on gender performativity raised in *Gender Trouble* (2006) to explain that she is not implying that 'we are what we wear' and that "one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open

⁵ In Fig. 51, I perform Joan Sutherland as Lucia in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. See reference *Joan Sutherland as Lucia* (2013).

space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night" (2011, p. ix). Rather gender is constructed through the repetition and reiteration of performative acts but without, "an "I" or "we" [agent] who stands before that construction" (2011: p. xvi).

Butler responds to the voluntarist (mis)appropriation of her thesis by stating that 'performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-representation; nor can it simply be equated with performance'... performativity is not something the subject does, but is a process through which the subject is constituted... This distinction between voluntarism and anti-voluntarism is... the difference between performance and performativity respectively. (Sullivan: 2003 p. 89)

Drag, and other forms of cross-dressing in performance, do not constitute a performative construction of gender in themselves therefore, but do highlight that gender is a copy without an original (Butler: 2006). In doing so these performances act as subversive reminders of the instability of gender. This then challenges masculinist binarism and therefore heterosexuality as normal and natural, as well as privileged over other forms of sexuality (Butler: 2006). However, Butler warns that "there are domains in which heterosexuality can concede its lack of originality and naturalness but still hold onto its power" (2011, p. 85). Using the examples of the films *Tootsie*, *Victor/Victoria* and *Some Like it Hot* "where the anxiety over a possible homosexual consequence is both produced and deflected within the narrative trajectory of the films" (2011, p. 85) Butler questions their subversive power when they provide "ritualistic release for a heterosexual economy that must constantly police its own boundaries against the invasion of queerness" (2011, p. 86). Not all cross-dressing is therefore automatically subversive.

Britten's *Curlew River* (1964) is a good example of how cross-dressing can go towards upholding rather than challenging the patriarchy in the context of opera. The character of the mad woman is sung by a tenor. When the 'miracle' occurs, which releases her from her madness through the ritual of the opera (presented traditionally in a church) the all male cast and the institution of the church are held up as having saved her from madness. However her madness is in fact a quite legitimate grief for the lost of her son and so closer scrutiny exposes the church not as having cured her but as having inflicted the construction of madness upon her in the first place. She is, from the outset, a woman represented by a man in a male world – the very epitome of the male construction of woman on stage – represented as mad, rather than as grief stricken. Cross-dressing therefore must be a vehicle to highlight the imitative nature of gender rather than be an imitation of a woman; a fantasy of women constructed by a man (a concept explored in both *Butterfly Ghost* and *Mozart solo No. 1*). Hence in undertaking cross-dressing in *Admiring La Stupenda* in such a way as to expose the mediation of performance in creating the illusion of gender transformation I am also developing ways in which to navigate the intersection of feminist and queer concerns in my practice. Through the use of this more nuanced approach to gender fluidity, and through spoken text and demonstrations of movement and process, the work brings my research and practice to a conclusion. Through an autobiographical exploration of my encounters (live or mediated through recordings) with Joan Sutherland, the piece is a demonstration of my methodology that has allowed the lived experience of the researcher to inform the research. The piece also includes findings of the research through the performance of particular aspects of choreography that are informed by my

observations of singers. *Admiring La Stupenda* should be viewed as the final outcome of the research.⁶

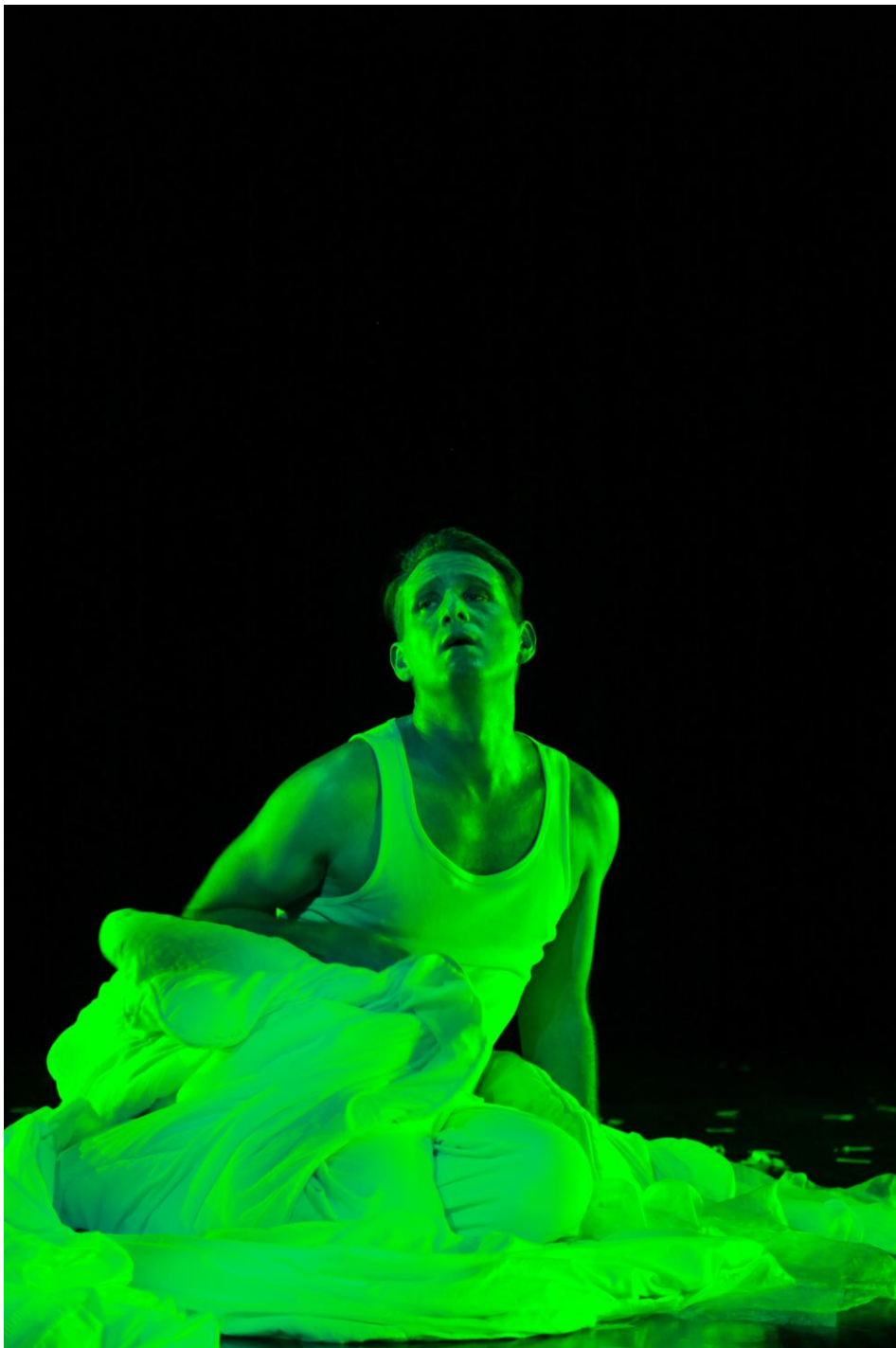


Fig. 52: Daniel Somerville in *Admiring La Stupenda*. One of the last images from the work; the fully embodied opera queen, grappling with memories of mother and diva, illustrates the use of autobiography in the practice and research. November 2013, The Performance Hub, University of Wolverhampton. Photo: Jemima Yong.

⁶ In addition to the documentation on DVD, the script and cue sheet for *Admiring La Stupenda* is included in Appendix 4: *Admiring La Stupenda*.

Conclusion

{Epilogue}

The title of the thesis frames the programme of research as a search for the operatic in the performance of the body. The bodies in question were both those of opera singers, and those of dancers, including my own body, that of the researcher as practitioner. One research question was posed in order to undertake this search, which was: “What are the physical, practical, theoretical and philosophical conditions that influence the movement of opera singers and therefore what factors are involved in the generation and negotiation of the operatic?”

Three aims of the research were stated in the introduction, which complement the research question and amount to an experiment that sought to extract the operatic, in terms of movement, from the bodies of singers in opera and utilise it as a movement style, referred to as Body Opera, in the bodies of dancers or non-singing performers. These three aims were: firstly, to identify, theorise and describe operatic movement as it is observed in opera singers during the research period; secondly, to create a vocabulary to capture these observations and thirdly, to attempt to engender the operatic in the bodies of non-singing performers using this vocabulary and other findings of the research.

Three lines of enquiry were developed in order to address the research question and aims. Firstly, to enquire if the operatic is a feature of the training of singers and to see

how the operatic is negotiated in the relationship between the singer and director. This line of enquiry addressed the aspect of the research question concerning the physical and practical factors involved in the generation and negotiation of the operatic. The second line of enquiry involved experimenting with engendering the operatic in the bodies of non-singers. This line of enquiry addressed the three aims of the research constituting the experiment to extract the operatic, in terms of movement, from the bodies of singers in opera and utilise it in the bodies of non-singing performers. The third line of enquiry examined opera through the lens of queer theory. This line of enquiry addressed the theoretical and philosophical conditions referred to in the research question in relation to the generation of the operatic.

The first line of enquiry was explored in Chapter Two: Performing Opera and was continued in Chapter Three: Embodiment. This line of enquiry was executed by interviewing singers and through observing singers in rehearsal as explained in Chapter One: Methodology. In summary, interviews concerned training in movement and matters pertaining to the relationship of singer and director in rehearsal, as well as singer and conductor in performance. The observing of rehearsals enabled me to witness the interactions between the singers and directors and to capture movements that were perceived as operatic through note taking and sketch making. This process was necessarily preceded by the development of criteria for the identification of operatic movement. These were: was it generated as a result of being performed in opera and was it repeated in the bodies of different singers? In addition these instances

of movement were then reflected upon taking into consideration a reading of opera as queer, resistive, non-normative and subversive.

The operatic movement that I was searching for was therefore, a way of moving found in, or caused by, the performance of opera that is nonetheless shared among different categories and types of singers. This meant that it was important to interview and observe a representative selection of singers and companies respectively. The sample group of singers was not large but was representative of a range of categories; evenly split in terms of gender and in terms of high and low voice types – soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone, and bass voices were all represented. The singers in the sample group were also at different stages in their careers ranging from student singers to veterans of the stage. The companies ranged from international and national companies to regional and mid-size touring companies, undertaking a range of repertoire that sought to reflect the larger landscape of opera performance in England and Wales during the research period. The operatic was read as queer or non-normative through a theoretical exploration of opera that positioned naturalistic approaches to acting in opera as 'normative'. Movements instigated by the director (all of those observed were using naturalistic acting techniques and were concerned with psychological motivation and action derived from textual analysis) could thereby be filtered from movements which were instigated by the singer in response to singing and being in opera. Operatic movements were, as a result, not those concerned with creating and playing character or delivering narrative, but operated alongside these

features of performance. I was searching for, and researching, not the way opera singers move in opera, but how being in opera moves singers.

To discuss the second line of enquiry I refer back to three aims stated above. The experiment to try to engender the operatic in non-singing performers began with identifying and describing operatic movements in singers. I then began to create a vocabulary for capturing operatic movement, which arose from the close observation of singers in performance and in rehearsal. As ways of moving and particular gestures occurred (and re-occurred in different singers), these were captured in sketches and notes. In applying certain nomenclature to these movements I was already aware of the desire to use them to engender movement in non-singers. Therefore, the vocabulary refers in two directions, to the original movement as it was observed in opera, and to how this term might inspire a movement in a non-singer. In this way the sketches, combined with embodiment techniques derived from Butoh, were used to bridge the gap between the spectatorial position of the opera queen and performance positions of performance maker, choreographer and dancer. In Chapter Two: Performing Opera I make the first of a number of observations contributing to understanding the physical conditions of operaticness, which is the need to maintain the vocal instrument (larynx to pelvic floor) through correct posture, even when moving. In Chapter Three: Embodiment I describe how I began to develop 'opera-fu' as a way to 'notate' certain ways of moving based on the model presented by *Butoh-fu* and then go on to explain how I experimented with opera-fu in a project with dancers. The

conclusion I reached from this experiment was that embodiment techniques using *Butoh-fu*-like images and a knowledge of the maintenance of the imaginary instrument alone, were not, on their own, sufficient to engender operaticness in dancers.

In Chapter Four: Operatic Emergence a further set of observations added some sudden and less flowing movements to the list of those ways of moving and gestures that I regarded as operatic. In Chapter Five: Empathy, I summarise the physical conditions for operatic movement and then position the knowledge and sensitivity of the opera queen as a factor in engendering operaticness in non-singing performers. In this way the overarching aim to bridge spectatorial and performance positions by extracting operatic movement from opera and engendering it in non-singing performers was ultimately achieved. The physical conditions of operatic movement and a list of the vocabulary developed in relation to this, is provided below, in the section on findings and outcomes.

The third line of enquiry, the use of an analogy between ideas on gender construction found in the foundational texts of queer theory and opera, was begun in Chapter Two: Performing Opera and continued in Chapter Four: Operatic Emergence. In summary, when viewed through the lens of queer theory opera may be read as beginning to operate according to the dynamics performative gender construction proposed by Butler (2006) and I apply ideas found in Butler, Foucault and Sedgwick analogously to opera, throughout the thesis. In particular the category of opera is read as being constructed

through a sedimentary process of construction through the repetition of stylised acts over time, and individual operas are constructed through the intersection of disciplines and their transformation at that intersection in performance. This line of enquiry contributes to a re-evaluation of opera as subversive and exposes the potential for it to be read as queer, a position that allows for the radical rereading of individual operas, as well as the positioning of camp, artificial and non-normative ways of moving as belonging to the operatic. This line of enquiry is complemented by a further proposition of the research, which is the characterisation of the operatic as an emergent property – emerging at the intersection of disciplines, but not inherent to those disciplines.

A critique of methodology

As highlighted above the sample group of singers interviewed was small. However, the sample was representative of a wide range of voice types, career positions and was equally split in terms of gender. This meant that the operatic, which was being observed, was not assumed to belong to one type, generation or gender of singer. The hypothesis being that if the operatic was occurring as a result of being in opera, it should occur regardless of these categories. As it did occur across the range of singers interviewed and no strong correlations between voice type, career position or gender were found, in this regard a small sample was still able to illustrate the point. It is also the case that singers enjoy long careers and travel frequently and so the findings can be extrapolated to a larger group, although further research of this kind could support this notion and perhaps focus more on differences rather than similarities. In this way

the research presented does indicate a further avenue of research involving a larger group of singers and a wider range of companies, over a longer period.

The use of autobiography as a means to interrogate subjects beyond the self within the research can only provide a subjective view which acknowledges the position of the researcher within the research. There is therefore no claim within the research that it presents an objective observation of the subject of opera or operatic movement that should replace more generally held views. The conclusions of the research are drawn with the acknowledgement that other perspectives may lead to other conclusions. However, the strength of this approach is that it provides a perspective, which is drawn directly from the lived experience of the researcher. This perspective can therefore challenge the legitimacy and centrality of normative readings of opera and the operatic, and can transform other perspectives, being a universalising account that, if nothing else, demonstrates how normative readings are equally unable to claim to be objective and infallible. To study opera from a queer perspective is not a minoritising account relevant only to queer readers, but a universalising account which forces a re-evaluation of assumed and accepted truths on opera.

Furthermore, the queer theoretical framework that was applied was itself arrived at as a result of looking at opera and re-assessing certain performance traditions and conventions. The reasons then, for analysing opera and the operatic through the lens of queer theory, were found in opera itself and were not imposed arbitrarily from

outside. Rather than relegating queer traditions and conventions to the periphery as aberrations (as a binary model of gender may do to alternative sexualities) the research brings them to the fore and critiques the reasons why they may have been relegated in the first place – as an aspect of a masculinist patriarchal agenda that legitimises the power of men through compulsory heterosexuality that maintains binarism. In this way we may conclude that despite strong connections to the establishment, opera may be read as having been engaged, throughout its history, in attempts to subvert and challenge the establishment, while the patriarchal establishment has been engaged in finding ways to allow opera its quirks while stripping them of their power to subvert. The opera house, rather than being a bastion of the establishment in the cultural landscape, may therefore be viewed as a powerful liminal space that permits the display of unconventional representations of gender, for example, while maintaining control over how those representations may be read. The notion of suspension of disbelief, I have presented as an example of how this control may be exerted, as within the term, spectators are required to accept that what they are witnessing is not a possible truth outside the performance while it may be regarded as one within it. The idea that queer perspectives on opera are disempowered by their being already 'outed' as Hadlock implies (2012, p. 264) may be viewed as a further strategy to undermine the power of non-normative readings. The queer analysis of opera presented herein goes beyond pointing out the potentially queer content of opera and engages rather with demonstrating how opera may be read as queer in terms of form. This in turn is manifests in the operatic, which is interrogated in relation to movement.

The practice created as part of the thesis may also be critiqued as an aspect of methodology. The creation of pieces of practice contributed to the developing understanding of, and vocabulary for capturing, the operatic and they stand alongside the written component in support of the thesis. The performances are represented within the submitted material through photographic images and video documentation of the performances. Documentation can only be a representation of the practice however, and can never replace the experience of encountering the performance live. Given that few will encounter the practice live in totality, performance practice as research is therefore a compromise that demands some imagination on the part of the reader to fill in what two dimensional representations lack. Furthermore, the practice itself was created in order to interrogate the subject of the thesis. In this regard these works are not necessary works that I, as a performance maker, would allow to stand alone, without the written component with which they are in dialogue. Each performance investigated an aspect of theory or was an opportunity to test physically the material I had observed in opera singers. They are not always complete works in terms of narrative structure therefore, and would require some reworking and further development if they were to be presented unaccompanied by the written component of the thesis. *The Canterbury Masque* and *Admiring la Stupenda* are perhaps the exceptions. In the case of *The Canterbury Masque* it was a completed work that was not solely concerned with addressing the research, though as a piece of practice it moved my research forward. Concerning *Admiring La Stupenda*, though my inclination would be to lengthen it perhaps if revived, I view it as a completed work that

through its employment of autobiographical storytelling, as well as movement that is informed by the research could be presented without the contextualization of the written component.

Findings and outcomes

The thesis provides three findings by way of propositions regarding how the operatic occurs in the bodies of opera singers. These can be summarised together as: The operatic is an emergent property that is embodied in performance and learned through a process of kinaesthetic empathy.

The first proposition is that the operatic is an emergent property, emerging at the intersection of disciplines in performance and sometimes in stage orchestra rehearsals, the orchestra playing a noticeable, but not indispensable, role in engendering the emergence of the operatic. Secondly, the operatic is involuntarily embodied in that moment but may be consciously resisted or, in the absence of an orchestra, consciously engendered – as shown by the occurrences of operatic movement by singers in piano accompanied recitals but not in piano accompanied rehearsals. Lastly, that in order for the operatic to be embodied and for the singer to respond to its emergence, the singer will have acquired a sense of what the body will do when that embodiment occurs through having experienced it (often unconsciously or at least not as an aspect of formal training) as a form of kinaesthetic empathy when observing other singers. In this way, a sense of how operatic movement is executed is transferred from one singer to

another via a process of kinaesthetic empathy that may occur through viewing live or recorded movement and/or still images of singers in movement.

A further finding of the research is in identifying the correlation between the experience of the singer in this kinaesthetic exchange and the experience of the opera queen, who undergoes a comparable process of kinaesthetic empathy. This realisation enabled me to complete a process for engendering operatic movement in non-singing performers.

Performers seeking to move operatically when not singing should nonetheless be aware of the restrictions placed on the body if they were singing, with particular attention to the maintenance of the instrument from pelvic floor to larynx. The following eight points were developed by me to describe how this may be achieved:

1. The body is held so that the vocal instrument can be supported and remains free of tension, when still or in movement.
2. As the diaphragm and abdominal muscles must remain free and able to support and accommodate breath into the lower lungs, there is a greater emphasis on the muscles of the back in achieving mobility.
3. The torso is rarely twisted, bent or otherwise distorted when singing. Although this may happen, it affects the quality of the voice, which may, nevertheless, be undertaken selectively for matters of dramatic impact.

4. Bending of the body is therefore undertaken below the pelvic floor at the top of the legs; twists and changes in directional focus occur from the pelvis or through the shifting of weight horizontally across the legs and feet with slightly bended knees.
5. As a result the legs are unlocked and mobile even when standing still. The feet are usually apart creating a wide base over which the body may appear to change its centre of balance while remaining grounded.
6. Expression is generated largely through movement of the arms and head, the relation of which to each other become important in generating meaning and in communicating emotion.
7. The arms are usually held away from the body even when they are at the side of the body to prevent any constriction of the lungs from the side.
8. The neck is kept relaxed at the front and movement of the head is generated through the back of the neck, creating an upward movement at the back when the head is bent forward for example.

Performers wishing to move operatically can additionally employ opera-fu that have been developed during the research period (and may also develop their own opera-fu) as a means to generate or emulate ways of moving that occur as a result of, or in conjunction with, the bodily restrictions of singing operatically or as a result of responding to music. The opera-fu developed during the research are listed (not an exhaustive list) in the following table along with other types of exercises to help

performers experience something of the corporeality of operatic movement. Body Opera has been described as 'non-foundational' within the thesis and therefore these are not included in order to fix choreography but as useful exercises in preparing the body for moving and for creating a mindfulness of the singer's body.

Type	Body Part	Name	Description for practicing	Notes
Carriage and posture	Whole body	The imaginary instrument	See 8 points (pp. 194-195)	Practice moving about with mindfulness of these restrictions before adding other aspects of operatic movement.
A exercise in flow derived from the 'water-bag' exercise in Butoh	Whole body	Embodying music	Listen intently to recordings of gentle and beautiful music from opera, allowing the body to move freely in flowing motions that follow the line of the legato and phrasing within the music, making changes of direction in response to musical gestures and changes in colouration. Imagine the body is a bag of water and concentrate on flow and counter-flow of the liquid.	Be as free as possible and use this as a warm-up – there are no wrong moves as long as you listen to the music and allow the body to flow in fluid motions without interruption. Disregard the imaginary instrument for this warm-up.
Isolation derived from Shea.	Arms and hands	Shea's forearm	Place the forearm anywhere within the natural sphere of rotation of the arm allowing the wrist to remain limp and fingers relaxed so that they open and close without effort.	This exercise should be undertaken as a warm-up. Experiment with how the forearm is placed and moved.

Opera-fu developed by Daniel Somerville	Arms and hands	Candy-floss machine	Imagine the palm producing a flow of candy-floss which propels the hand in gentle arcs that cross in front of the body. Embody the notion of walking through the structures allowing them to collapse around you and affect the quality of your movement as you progress through space.	Although in performance this would appear fleetingly or be used in conjunction with other images, adopt this as a practice walk during warm-up – travelling through and around the room while isolating this movement.
Opera-fu developed by Daniel Somerville	Arms and hands	Toy train track	Imagine the wrist is attached to a small toy train on a track that runs almost level through space, perhaps with gentle undulations from the height of the sternum to the chest only. The wrist leads the arm and is not limp, but not too stiff either.	Use both arms and practice while standing and walking. The movement may bring the arm close to the body as well as creating arcs around and away from the body.
Opera-fu developed by Daniel Somerville	Arms, hands and head	Headlamps	Imagine the palms and face as car headlamps issuing strong beams of light. Be mindful of what the beams illuminate and how the beams carve, divide, draw in or open and extend space. Move the palms and face with intent so that the beams remain stable and do not tremble or cross.	The image is used in three ways: to manipulate space, to send attention to a place or a part of the body and to highlight the relation of palm to face – the drawing away of one from the other can create the illusion of extending movement without affecting the imaginary instrument.
Opera-fu developed by Daniel Somerville	Arms and hands	Stick in palm	Embody the image of a stick held in the palm and driven into the floor. Allow the rigidity to travel up the arm and into the back of the neck and head.	Experiment with beginning and ending the movement abruptly or gradually.

Opera-fu contributed by Shauna Tunstall (informed by Laban's 'wringing' effort action)	Whole body	Wringing towel	Twist the body from head to toe and/or from hand to hand in as many directions as possible, curling in like a well wrung towel as the tension builds. Embody the notion of the water spilling out. As tension is released maintain the image of the stiffened fibres of the towel.	This can be used as an exercise in creating and releasing tension, in which case the imaginary instrument cannot be maintained. Experiment with how this motion can be made while still maintaining the instrument.
Opera-fu contributed by Shauna Tunstall	Whole body	Broken mannequin	Embody the image of the mannequin and then break it at the pelvis so that the upper body is suddenly at an angle from the lower body while still maintaining the instrument.	Experiment with speeds, angles and direction.
Travelling	Feet	Light foot	Walk on the balls of the feet keeping the heel as close to the floor as possible without applying weight. Extend the exercise to standing in this manner.	To approach this exercise warm-up by rising on the balls of the feet and slowly descending until the heel almost touches the floor and then rise again – best undertaken bare foot.
Grounding	Whole body	Pelvis leads	Maintaining the imaginary instrument and keeping the feet firmly grounded with legs apart and knees unlocked move the pelvis across the horizontal plane. Then allow the pelvis to lead the body in diagonal and vertical motions.	Experiment with how the torso follows the pelvis while maintain the instrument.

Grounding	Whole body	The shudder down	With feet apart and flat to the floor make a sudden shudder generated in the core that travels rapidly down through the pelvis and coccyx and into the heel, causing the knees to bend slightly to absorb the impact. Maintain the imaginary instrument.	A sharp intake of breath can help with this exercise. Be mindful not to allow the shudder to rise up through the neck and head – these should remain stable and unaffected.
Nuance derived from Shea	Whole body	Deferred completion	Decide on a starting and ending position for the whole body and limbs. Place each part of the body in the new position one by one arriving at the complete new position with one last adjustment.	Practice using different positions and different last movements – though ending with hands and/or a turn of the head are most common.
Nuance	Whole body	Shimmering statue	Minimise the movement generated in 'embodying music' exercise and the 'shudder down' while remaining on 'light foot'. Try to remain still but alive, use the image of a volcano about to erupt.	This exercise can also be undertaken in pairs.
Nuance	Whole body	Opposition and asymmetry	Be mindful that hands and face as well as other parts of the body when moving away from each other at different speeds and in asymmetrical forms can add to the illusion of contortion or movement while actually maintaining the instrument.	
Gesture	Upper body	Absence gesture	The downstage arm indicates upstage and behind the performer.	This gesture specifically indicates something or someone who is absent. It may also indicate people, things or events in the past.

Expression derived from Butoh silent scream	Face	Cucumber	Imagine a cucumber growing in your throat, as it grows it pushes your tongue down then travels upwards and outwards, opening your mouth wide as it then travels out of your mouth.	The expression is completed with glazed eyes that look into the far distance.
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Lastly, performers wishing to move operatically should also seek to embody the opera queen's perspective through 'opera queening' – embracing camp and artificiality alongside opera anecdote, lore, habits and conventions, as well as engaging with the myths, legends and histories that surround opera, opera performance and opera singers, and allowing reflections on one's own life history and experience to become a part of the operatic experience and expression.

The artistry of the opera singer

One further conclusion of the research is that I identify the artistry of the opera singer as the ability to embody music and physicalise the operatic. The table below illustrates the different aspects of opera that contribute to the ways in which a singer will produce movement and so adds to the description of the practical conditions under which operatic movement is generated. The table also illustrates where those aspects of opera are mediated by other contributing artists. It shows that only in respect of the embodiment of music in performance, does the singer have sole responsibility. This I identify as the 'artistry' of the opera singer and it is dependent upon their ability to embody music and the operatic at the intersection of the many disciplines coalescing in performance.

<u>Movement is influenced by:</u>	<u>Responsibility</u>
1. Character	
a. The persona	Librettist/Composer
b. The plot	Librettist
2. Opera	
a. Structure	Librettist/Composer
b. Periodicity	Librettist/Composer & Director/Designer
3. Music	
a. Atmosphere	Composer
b. Tempo	Conductor
4. Production	
a. Design	Designer
b. Direction	Director
5. Performance	
a. Action	Director/Movement Director/Singer
b. The act of singing	Singer/Coach/Teacher
c. Embodiment of music	Singer

Throughout the thesis I have, without it being an intention or aim of the research, presented a defence of the operatic. A defence may be needed because during the research I heard repeatedly in interview responses and in informal conversations that the operatic as I had identified it may be threatened by an increase in the desire of directors, particularly those coming to opera from theatre, to treat opera as a form of drama and to apply naturalistic acting techniques to the art form. If the operatic, as it manifests in movement, is eradicated through the kinds of excising and correcting that were observed during the research and referred to in interview responses, then the taste for naturalism is not only a threat to our ability to perceive opera as a non-normative, but to the one aspect of its performance that is unique and different from other performing arts. The embodiment of the operatic in the body of the singer and a

singer's ability to allow that emergence to move them 'operatically' is the one aspect of their performance not mediated through another discipline or generated as a result of collaboration with another artist. The preservation of the operatic that I propose is necessary is not only a defence of opera but a defence of the perceivably unappreciated 'artistry' of the opera singer.

Contribution to knowledge

The research discussed in this thesis has identified, analysed and described operatic movement in the practice of opera as it occurred at the time of the research. As a result, a way of moving referred to as 'operatic' can be extracted from the practice of opera singers and be performed by non-singing performers. In considering how the thesis makes a contribution to knowledge it is acknowledged that the research points in two directions therefore, encompassing both the movement practitioner's perspective on opera, as well as the opera scholar/spectator's influence on movement practice. The primary contribution to knowledge may therefore have emerged from the methodology. The making of sketches of singer's in movement, which is regarded as a kinaesthetic process, combined with embodiment techniques derived from Butoh that enable the information in the sketches to be re-revealed has allowed kinaesthetic information to be transferred from opera singers to dancers and other non-singing performers. The methodology has therefore provided a bridge between the spectatorial position of the opera queen/researcher and the movement practitioner/performance position.

What this process has brought to opera studies is that it has positioned the operatic in terms of movement as a feature of opera and the ability of the singer to acquire and execute it as the principal feature of their artistry. The thesis posits that this aspect of performance distinguishes opera and the opera singer from other performing arts and artists. Where opera is acknowledged as interdisciplinary it nonetheless has this feature which emerges and which is not derived from the contributing disciplines. Furthermore the thesis has suggested that a trend in directorial practice is occurring that threatens this aspect of the art form. The thesis takes a new approach to the subject of opera and contributes to the literature on opera by addressing opera as a kinaesthetic phenomenon as well as by centralising the experience of singers as a way to research opera. Opera has been interrogated in regard to how movement occurs in the body of the singer as a result of performing in opera. A contribution is made to opera studies by expanding the field beyond textual and musicological analysis, and analysis of performance strategies, histories and styles, by embedding the corporeal in the research. The body of the singer is centralised in the research and this perspective on opera, and a body capable to embodying the operatic as it emerges in performance, is revealed and theorised.

The research also establishes a correlation between the experiences of opera performers and the responses of opera queens to opera, in particular citing kinaesthetic empathy as the vehicle through which operaticness is communicated. The research therefore makes a contribution to knowledge by offering practical exercises and

suggestions for how to extract this way of moving from the practice of opera and utilise it in the bodies of non-singing performers, which has not been previously attempted. This is made possible through a radical re-evaluation of opera using queer theory, which goes beyond identifying queer aspects and readings of operas and makes a reading of the art form as operating according to theories concerning gender construction.

In offering strategies for how non-singing performers might approach moving operatically, the study also contributes to movement studies, and to performance, by examining the body of the singer and understanding how the artificiality of breath and internal musculature necessary for producing an operatic sound also causes the body to move in a way that is rich with expressive material. Operatic movement offers the dancer or movement practitioner a way of moving that is firmly grounded and in which expressive material is not generated through distortion of the torso or through extension and athleticism, as is the case in much Western dance. Rather expression occurs through concentration on the relation of limbs to face and torso, through understanding the body as an aspect of scenography and as a sculptural form in space, and through understanding the body as a living vibrating presence even when in stillness. The curves and arcs that occur in the negotiation of expression and action alongside the need to maintain (for the non-singing performer) an imaginary internal instrument, engenders a subtle new way of creating physical material, namely Body Opera, the practice of the researcher, which has been presented, analysed and for

which a vocabulary for communicating it has begun to be formulated. As an aspect of the research, seven pieces of practice were created in order to explore these findings. These works constitute a contribution to the arts and to knowledge in themselves, being new works of art, but they also demonstrate how the methodology discussed above was successful in exploiting the operatic movement of opera singers in the bodies of non-singing performers. Thus the bridging of the gap between the spectatorial and performer positions is evidenced.

Further avenues of research were revealed during the research. Beyond the repeating of the interviews and observerships on a larger scale suggested above, the role of kinaesthetic empathy and the exchange of kinaesthetic material between conductor and singer could also be researched. Certainly there were moments where this exchange was visible in orchestra rehearsals and given that stewardship of the production shifts firmly to the conductor and away from the director at this point and given that the conductor is embodying the music prior to it being heard, there is an interesting relationship to be researched which centralises the experience of conductors as conduit between score and movement. There is also the area of non-narrative works of opera and their relation to the operatic. Where the expression of character, sound world and the scenography may be more abstract or minimal and may be perceived as less traditionally operatic, research could focus on how the operatic emerges, if it does, in these cases. Further research may also interrogate if the operatic emerges in opera in other contributing creative disciplines other than movement.

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Appendix 1: Operas Attended

Within each category, operas are listed, in the order that they were attended. It should be noted that while I argue for a holistic view of the 'work' that recognises that librettists and directors make considerable contributions to the authorship of opera, I am however, to avoid confusion when cross referencing, observing the convention of assigning principle authorship to the musical composer throughout the thesis, with the exception of *Einstein on the Beach* where principal authorship is shared between director and composer as is commonly acknowledged in this case. Also to be noted is that capitalisation in the title of each opera follows the rules of the language of the title but where operas were performed in English translations and an English title was assigned, this is reflected in the list.

The full productions observed in rehearsal, as well as in performance or live relay

Donizetti, G. (1836) *L'assedio di Calais*. [Performance] Dir. James Conway, English Touring Opera, Hackney Empire, London. [9th March 2013]

Verdi, G. (1857) *Simon Boccanegra*. [Performance] Dir. James Conway, English Touring Opera, Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton. [16th April 2013]

Wagner, R. (1848) *Lohengrin*. [Performance] Dir. Antony McDonald, Welsh National Opera, The Hippodrome, Birmingham. [13th June 2013]

Puccini, G. (1916) *La rondine*. [Live relay to 'BP Big Screen' Canary Wharf] Dir. Nicolas Joël, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [11th July 2013]

Puccini, G. (1899) *Tosca*. [Live relay to 'BP Big Screen' Canary Wharf] Dir. Jonathan Kent, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [18th July 2013]

Britten, B. (1945) *Peter Grimes*. [Dress rehearsal] Dir. Phyllida Lloyd, Opera North, Grand theatre and Opera House, Leeds. [13th September 2013]

Donizetti, G. (1830) *Anna Bolena*. [Performance] Dir. Alessandro Talevi, Welsh National Opera, The Hippodrome, Birmingham. [13th November 2013]

Productions in live performance or through live relay

Janáček, L. (1921) *Katya Kabanova*. [Performance] Dir. Katie Mitchell, Welsh National Opera, Birmingham Hippodrome, Birmingham. [16th November 2011]

Mozart, W. A. (1790) *Così fan tutte*. [Performance] Dir. Jonathan Miller, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [10th February 2012]

Strauss, R. (1911) *Der Rosenkavalier*. [Performance] Dir. David McVicar, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [11th February 2012]

Adams, J. (1991) *The Death of Klinghoffer*. [Performance] Dir. Tom Morris, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [25th February 2012]

Cage, J. (1967) *Musircircus*. [Performance] Dir. Stephen Montague, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [3rd March 2012]

Offenbach, J. (1881) *The Tales of Hoffman*. [Performance] Dir. Richard Jones, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [8th March 2012]

Glass, P. & Wilson, R. (1976) *Einstein on the Beach*. [Performance] Dir. Robert Wilson, The Barbican, London. [13th May 2012]

Tippett, M. (1962) *King Priam*. [Concert performance] Britten Sinfonia, Con. Sian Edwards, Concert Hall, Brighton Dome, Brighton. [27th May 2012]

Puccini, G. (1896) *La bohème*. [Performance] Dir. Annabel Arden, Welsh National Opera, Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff. [1st June 2012]

Wagner, R. (1859) *Tristan und Isolde*. [Performance] Dir. Yannis Kokkos, Welsh National Opera, Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff. [2nd June 2012]

Stockhausen, K. (1997) *Mittwoch aus Licht*. [Performance] Dir. Graham Vick, Birmingham Opera Company, Argyle Works, Birmingham. [25th August 2012]

Venables, P. (2012) *UNLEASHED: An Anti-opera About Maleness*. [Performance] Dir. Nick Blackburn, Fourfortytwo and the Blackburn Company, Arcola Theatre, London. [31st August 2012]

Meyerbeer, G. (1831) *Robert le Diable*. [Performance] Dir. Laurent Pelly, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [18th December 2012]

Verdi, G. (1836) *Nabucco*. [Performance] Dir. Daniele Abbado, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [1st April 2013]

Mozart, W. A. (1790) *Così fan tutte*. [Performance] Dir. Paul Higgins, English Touring Opera, Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton. [15th April 2013]

Harvey, J. (2007) *Wagner Dream*. [Performance] Dir. Pierre Audi, Welsh National Opera, The Hippodrome, Birmingham. [12th June 2013]

Britten, B. (1953) *Gloriana*. [Performance] Dir. Richard Jones, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London. [29th June 2013]

Wagner, R. (1857) *Siegfried*. [Performance] Dir. Peter Mumford, Opera North, Leeds Town Hall, Leeds. [13th July 2013]

Verdi, G. (1857) *Simon Boccanegra*. [Performance] Dir. Elijah Moshinsky, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [16th July 2013]

Rameau, J-P. (1733) *Hippolyte et Aricie*. [Performance] Dir. Jonathan Kent, Glyndebourne Festival Opera. [25th July 2013]

Strauss, R. (1909) *Elektra*. [Performance] Dir. Charles Edwards, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [6th October 2013]

Donizetti, G. (1835) *Maria Stuarda*. [Performance] Dir. Rudolf Frey, Welsh National Opera, The Hippodrome, Birmingham. [14th November 2013]

Donizetti, G. (1838) *Roberto Devereux*. [Performance] Dir. Alessandro Talevi, Welsh National Opera, The Hippodrome, Birmingham. [15th November 2013]

Britten, B. (1964) *Curlew River*. [Performance] Dir. Netia Jones, St. Giles Cripplegate, Barbican, London. [16th November 2013]

Puccini, G. (1903) *Madam Butterfly*. [Performance] Dir. Anthony Minghella, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [1st December 2013]

Wagner, R. (1882) *Parsifal*. [Live relay to Hackney Picturehouse] Dir. Stephen Langridge, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [18th December 2013]

Britten, B. (1945) *Peter Grimes*. [Live relay to Hackney Picturehouse] Dir. David Alden, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [23rd February 2014]

Handel, G-F. (1719) *Rodelinda*. [Performance] Dir. Richard Jones, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [11th March 2014]

Strauss, R. (1917) *Die Frau Ohne Schatten*. [Performance] Dir. Claus Guth, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [3rd April 2014]

Gounod, C-F. (1859) *Faust*. [Performance] Dir. David McVicar, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [17th April 2014]

Anderson, J. (2014) *Thebans*. [Performance] Dir. Pierre Audi, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [23rd May 2014]

Poulenc, F. (1953) *Dialogues des Carmélites*. [Performance] Dir. Robert Carson, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [29th May 2014]

Berlioz, H. (1837) *Benvenuto Cellini*. [Performance] Dir. Terry Gilliam, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [17th June 2014]

Bizet, G. (1863) *The Pearl Fishers*. [Performance] Dir. Penny Woolcock, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [23rd June 2014]

Puccini, G. (1892) *Manon Lescaut*. [Live relay to Hackney Picturehouse] Dir. Jonathan Kent, Royal Opera, Royal Opera House, London. [24th June 2014]

Mozart, W. A. (1790) *Così fan tutte*. [Performance] Dir. Phelim McDermott, English National Opera, London Coliseum, London. [2nd July 2014]

Britten, B. (1954) *The Turn of the Screw*. [Performance] Dir. Annilese Miskimmon, Opera Holland Park, Holland Park, London. [9th July 2014]

Donizetti, G. (1835) *Maria Stuarda*. [Performance] Dir. Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier, Royal Opera, Royal opera House, London. [14th July 2014]

Bellini, V. (1831) *Norma*. [Performance] Dir. Olivia Fuchs, Opera Holland Park, Holland Park, London. [4th August 2014]

Appendix 2: A Note on Opera Rehearsals

As I discuss events and observations made in opera rehearsals and the impact of, for example, the introduction of the orchestra into the rehearsal process, I will describe here, the structure of opera rehearsals and introduce some of the associated language. Operas are rehearsed firstly in studio with a *répétiteur* providing a piano accompaniment. The director, assistant director, stage manager and conductor are all generally present during studio rehearsals, which may last from six or eight weeks (or more) for new productions, to two weeks or less for revival productions. Generally speaking the studio rehearsals are divided into 'music rehearsals', where singers do not act or move around the space, and 'director's rehearsals' during which they will sing, whilst performing the action according to the director's intentions. During director's rehearsals singers may sing 'full out' – in full operatic voice at full volume, or they may 'mark' – sing in a half voice to protect the instrument during rehearsals where scenes are repeated several times. Studio rehearsals are principally aimed at developing character and action for the singers and may include certain aspects of costume. The text and vocal aspects of the roles are expected to be learned prior to the studio rehearsal period and vocal practice outside the studio continues with vocal coaches throughout.

The production moves on to the stage for 'stage piano rehearsals' which usually involve costume, and which are otherwise director's rehearsals without an orchestra. Once the production has been fitted to the stage and scenography (lighting will be finalised at this point in rehearsal) the production goes into 'stage orchestra

rehearsal' during which time the director hands the production over to the conductor and there is greater emphasis on the needs of the music for the singers. There is usually also a *sitzprobe* which is an opportunity for singers and orchestral musicians to rehearse only the musical aspects of the production with the conductor, with the singers traditionally seated. Finally the production goes to 'dress rehearsal' which brings all of the elements together with the same emphasis given to music and drama, but in productions I witnessed in dress rehearsal the conductor continues to have stewardship of the production at this point, with the exception of the Opera North production in which the director remained very actively involved in the rehearsal and shared stewardship with the conductor in a collaborative manner. Otherwise, this pattern of rehearsal was common to all the productions I observed.

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule: Opera Singers

Was the interview being conducted?

- By telephone
- In person
- Via email

Has the interviewee signed a consent form?

Has the interviewee given permission for the interview to be recorded?

Has the interviewee agreed to disclose their name and/or the name of the institution?

If yes:

Name:

Institution/Company:

Date of Interview:

Is the interviewee:

- Under 18
- A young artist or early career artist (opera singer who has only appeared in student and/or amateur productions and/or had minor roles in provincial or touring opera companies in the UK, or equivalent)
- An early-mid career artist (opera singer performing principal roles in provincial and touring opera companies in the UK and/or minor roles in national opera companies in the UK, or equivalent)
- Established artist (opera singer performing principal roles in national opera companies in the UK and/or supporting roles at The Royal Opera House, or equivalent)
- International artist (opera singers performing principal roles at the Royal Opera House, or equivalent)

In what decade/s did the interviewee receive most of their training?

Is training still ongoing in some form? If so how?

A.1 QUESTIONS: Posture

1. How would you describe correct posture for vocal production?

2. In your training as an opera singer, how would you rate the importance given to correct posture in order to produce the right quality of sound?
 - Very important
 - Important
 - Neither important nor unimportant
 - Unimportant
 - Irrelevant
- 2.1. Why?

3. What emphasis was given in vocal training to developing, encouraging and maintaining correct posture?
 - Heavy emphasis
 - Some emphasis
 - Little emphasis
 - Very little emphasis
 - No emphasis
- 3.1. Why?

4. Do you consider that correct posture for vocal production should be maintained when a singer is moving all or part of their body? Y/N

A.2 QUESTIONS: Movement (whole body movement, travelling in space, i.e. walking)

5. How would you describe correct movement for an opera singer, considering issues of vocal production?

6. What emphasis was given to movement as an aspect of your training?

- Heavy emphasis
- Some emphasis
- Little emphasis
- Very little emphasis
- No emphasis

6.1. Why?

7. Do you consider that vocal training and movement skills for opera singers should be taught separately? Y/N/don't know

7.1. Why?

8. Were/Are you taught movement skills separately to vocal skills?
Y/N/don't know

A. 3 QUESTIONS: gesture (expressive isolated movements of the arms, hands & head)

9. How would you describe appropriate gesturing of an opera singer, considering issues of vocal production?

10. What emphasis was given to physical gesture as an aspect of your training?

- Heavy emphasis
- Some emphasis
- Little emphasis
- Very little emphasis
- No emphasis

10.1. Why?

11. Do you consider that vocal training and training in gesture for opera singers should be taught separately? Y/N

11.1. Why?

12. Were/are you provided with training in gesture?
Y/N/don't know

A.4 QUESTIONS: 'bad habits' (gestures or movements that interrupt or restrict the voice in vocal training or which are superfluous to need)

13. When you were training did have what you would regard as 'bad habits' in terms of movement and gesture? Y/N

14. Can you describe some examples of what you would regard as a 'bad habit' in terms of movement or gesture?

15. What steps did/do you take to correct these?

16. What are the 'good' habits that you present, in terms of movement and/or gesture that you consider desirable to good opera performance?

B.1 QUESTIONS: In a production rehearsal process and performance

17. Have you ever been directed to move in ways which were contrary to good vocal production? Y/N

17.1 If YES, how often would you say this happens?

- This happens most of the time
- This happens often
- This happens sometimes
- This hardly happens
- This happened once

18. Do you find that some directors/movement directors discourage ways of moving that you would otherwise have considered good practice for an opera singer? Y/N

18.1 If YES, how often would you say this happens?

- This happens most of the time
- This happens often
- This happens sometimes
- This hardly happens
- This happened once

19. Have you ever been told by a director that your movement or gesture is 'too operatic'? Y/N

19.1 If YES, how often would you say this happens?

- This happens most of the time
- This happens often
- This happens sometimes
- This hardly happens
- This happened once

20. How are the above scenarios resolved?

EXTRA: What physical preparations before performing?

21. How collaborative (between singer and director) do you find the process of 'blocking' (where to be on stage and where and when to move)?
- It is the sole responsibility of the director (and their team)
 - It is mostly the responsibility of the director but I make contributions
 - It is completely collaborative (50/50 singer and director)
 - It is mostly the responsibility of the singer but the director makes contributions
 - It is the sole responsibility of the singer (and their coach)
22. How collaborative (between singer and director) do you find the development of gesture when learning a role?
- It is the sole responsibility of the director (and their team)
 - It is mostly the responsibility of the director but I make contributions
 - It is completely collaborative (50/50 singer and director)
 - It is mostly the responsibility of the singer but the director makes contributions
 - It is the sole responsibility of the singer (and their coach)
23. How collaborative (between singer and director) do you find the development of a way, or style, of moving and gesturing? (Not only when and where to do something but also *how* to do it; in what manner, the *quality* of the movement or gesture.)
- It is the sole responsibility of the director (and their team)
 - It is mostly the responsibility of the director but I make contributions
 - It is completely collaborative (50/50 singer and director)
 - It is mostly the responsibility of the singer but the director makes contributions
 - It is the sole responsibility of the singer (and their coach)
24. In your experience what changes occur in the way in which you move when you begin to rehearse with the orchestra?
25. Once a singer has learned a role, what is more important in performance?
- To follow the conductor
 - To listen to the music
 - Both to an equal degree
 - Neither
 - Other

26. Do you think that you 'embody' the music in performance? (Allow the music to move you or inform the quality of movement) Y/N

26.1 Can you describe this experience?

27. Have you ever had training in how to embody music? Y/N

27.1 If YES, what training?

28. Have you ever had training in what might be termed 'artistry'? (Not vocal, actor or movement training, but a way of being in performance that distinguishes opera singers from other performers.) Y/N

28.1 If YES, what training?

Thank you, please feel free to add any extra comments you think are relevant to an investigation of the term 'operatic' with regard in particular to how opera singers move.

Appendix 4: Admiring La Stupenda (overleaf)

Admiring La Stupenda – Cue sheet and Performance Text

Action	Text – may vary but cues in bold	Sound	Light	Haze
			Stage dark – gentle white wash across whole stage fades in over 4 sec to 70%	
Daniel enters – goes centre stage – he makes a bed from duvet sheet and pillows centre stage.	<p>Hello, I’m Daniel and I like opera. Actually I love opera – I am an ‘opera lover’. Funny how people who like theatre are theatre goers – but there’s no such thing as an opera goer – we are opera lovers. More specifically I am an ‘opera queen’. Opera queens have a certain way of understanding opera – and therefore the world, that I hope to impart. It’s hard to define but it’s something about layers of meaning, multiple truths, fragmentation, collage, slipping from one reality to another, the performer and the performed ... you know postmodern stuff, subversion and sex. Opera is sex. Which is why I have created this theatrical conceit that we are in my bedroom. Can we make the light more intimate? When I was young I would invite friends to my bedsit and play them the latest voice I’d discovered.</p> <p>Now just a quick check – who here has heard of Joan Sutherland?</p> <p>If I’d asked that question twenty years ago, the response would have been quite different. Joan was a global superstar and household name.</p> <p>Now I could tell you all the biographical details – she was Australian, came to fame in the 1960s in London, married a conductor ... etc. And go into all her career highlights, but you can get that from books – or the Internet. I’d rather tell you about how I encountered this amazing creature, this goddess of opera. To begin you have to imagine me as a 19 year old, on a bus passing</p>		The light becomes more concentrated around the bed – but not too tight, still light on the stage but not the whole stage.	

	Embankment station. I just been the library in Balham and borrowed a cassette tape – which I intended to copy. I slipped it into my walkman and pressed play. If you’ve never knowingly heard her voice – then your first encounter will be now – the same way I first heard her that day on a bus in London on my Walkman.			
Daniel moves and talks and dresses in the sheet	<p>(Daniel describes the opera and what is happening and talks about how Sutherland moves.)</p> <p>(NB: I will talk when music is playing so you may need to bring the music down a fraction in those moments but as soon as I stop talking the volume should go up again – but I will indicate this directly to the tech box.)</p>	01 Casta Diva NB – I may indicate to end the music before the track has finished – I will address the tech box directly.		
	A few months later I was at a house party – the host was an opera queen – I mentioned how much I had enjoyed Casta Diva and he asked if I had heard a duet from the same opera called Mira o Norma. He stopped the party and played it and we all sat entranced, mesmerized.			
	(Daniel talks about the voices, sensuality, sexuality)	02 Mira O Norma NB – I may indicate to end the music before the track has finished – I will address the tech box directly.		

	But Joan Sutherland was not only about these ‘opera light’ moments – these pretty bits. This kind of music ‘bel canto’ also contains faster sections, more florid. So after the aria you get the cabaletta, which involves intricate decoration – trills and such – and ends with the high note. Now Joan – she’s the master of the high note. Here’s how Norma continues after what you’ve just heard ...			
Daniel falls repeatedly	(Daniel talks about Joan and falling)	03 High note compilation		
While he talks Daniel dresses in the duvet and pillows.	The reason I called this piece Admiring La Stupenda is because that is what the Italians called Joan Sutherland. And it wasn’t as a result of singing the great nineteenth century Italian bel canto works. She was given the title after a performance of Handel’s Alcina in Venice. Just listen to this different style of music, the baroque age, brought to life through the very existence of a voice that could sing this intricate and detailed music with such precision.			
Moving operatically	(Daniel enthuses about the trills, decorations and high notes)	04 Alcina edit	Bright silvery light centre stage	Heavy haze from upstage centre
	But I digress – this is not, as I had promised, my experience of Joan. I wasn’t in Venice that day. I meant to tell you why I called this work ‘Admiring La Stupenda’. The ‘Admiring’ part is a reference to Kazuo Ohno’s ‘Admiring L’Argentina’ a Butoh work that acted as an embodied memory of Ohno’s experience of a performer known as L’Argentina. So this work is both recollections and anecdotes, as well as half remembered fragments of movement – an homage to Ohno perhaps as well as Joan – because like Ohno, I weave into it some thoughts about my mother. [pause] I wasn’t in Venice that day. And if I had a chance to go back in time it wouldn’t be to Venice – it would be to Covent Garden			

	<p>(date) – her debut as Lucia di Lammermoor. A legendary evening, a breakthrough performance. So my experience of Joan is also an experience of absence, of longing, of wondering.</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>The thing is I might have seen Joan sing Lucia. Very early in my opera going career I saw the opera at Covent Garden and tickets for that performance were in such demand that I queued from 2 in the morning to get one. The problem is, I didn't buy a programme – and she alternated that season with another singer. I might have seen and heard her sing Lucia, the role for which she was most famous, but I might not have. The bel canto tradition of the 'mad scene' reached its pinnacle. Lucia has been forced to marry against her will. On the wedding night she murders her husband and re-enters the wedding celebrations in her blood spattered wedding dress.</p>			
Daniel goes upstage right.	<p>I have a memory of the mad scene. But as I said I don't know if I saw her. I did see her sing Anna Bolena – also by Donizetti – and that also has a mad scene.</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>I've seen her do <i>a</i> mad scene.</p>		The stage darkens other than upstage right	Light haze from upstage centre
Moving operatically – Daniel goes upstage right diagonally to centre stage		Silent section Approx 2 minutes	Before he arrives there, centre stage is illuminated and the upstage right light patch begins to fade over 6 seconds	
Daniel goes stage left			As he arrives stage left illuminates – centre stage fades over 8 seconds	
Daniel goes stage right – diagonally downstage			Downstage right illuminates – stage left fades over 6 seconds	

Daniel moves at speed in an arc from downstage right to upstage centre to stage left			The light quickly illuminates where he is travelling and then fades out over 2 seconds in each case.	
Daniel moves to downstage centre – moves and falls			At tight patch of light illuminates downstage centre	
From the floor, sitting in among the bedding, undressing	<p>The last time I saw Joan Sutherland was at her final ever performance on stage. It was 1990 and she was a guest singer in a production of Die Fleidermaus. The last thing she ever sang was 'Home Sweet Home. As that other famous Australian diva – Nellie Melba had done in a previous century. I think of that frail voice, wearing a mountainous green tulle dress.</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>She died at her home in Switzerland – her legs gave way beneath her – she fell.</p> <p>[pause]</p> <p>And as I reach an age where I have to begin to look after my mother ...</p> <p>You know actually, that wasn't the last time I saw her. I went to Australia, to the Sydney Opera House. I saw her husband, Richard Bonyngue conduct a performance of The Pearl Fishers. It was a wonderful night. After the show I was crossing the car park of the Sydney opera house when a small car pulled up in front of me. I looked down – and there she was – Joan Sutherland – my idol – picking up her husband from work. So simple, so domestic.</p>			

<p>Daniel moves centre stage.</p> <p>Second verse – someone sweeps the stage.</p>		<p>05 Home Sweet Home</p>	<p>The stage transforms into a green wash with gobos</p> <p>As the music comes to an end the light fades to darkness.</p>	<p>Haze top up maybe</p>
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Bickley, S. (2013) Interviewed by Daniel Somerville, Birmingham, 13th June 2013.

Clarke, S. (2013) Interviewed by Daniel Somerville, Leeds, 9th August 2013.

Glover, A. (2013) [Feedback form] Wolverhampton, 16th April 2013.

Goeldner, K. (2013) Interviewed by Daniel Somerville, Cardiff, 2nd August 2013.

Hudson, P. (2013) Interviewed by Daniel Somerville, Leeds, 10th September 2013.

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Kemeny, L. (2013) Interviewed by Daniel Somerville, London, 6th August 2013.

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